



SELECTED POEMS

BY

W. B. YEATS



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LYRICAL AND NARRATIVE

BY

W. B. YEATS



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## PREFACE

I HAVE arranged in chronological order whatever lyrical and narrative poems of mine best please my friends or myself, or best illuminate one another. Though I have often in these last thirty years corrected the earliest, I leave all, even two in "The Rose" that are almost wholly new, in their original context, for all belong in thought and sentiment to the time when they were first written.

W. B. Y.

MAY 1929



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THE WANDERINGS OF USHEEN  
(1889)



## BOOK I

### S. PATRIC

You who are bent, and bald, and blind,  
With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,  
Have known three centuries, poets sing,  
Of dalliance with a demon thing.

### USHEEN

Sad to remember, sick with years,  
The swift innumerable spears,  
The horsemen with their floating hair,  
And bowls of barley, honey, and wine,  
Those merry couples dancing in tune,  
And the white body that lay by mine ;  
But the tale, though words be lighter than air,  
Must live to be old like the wandering moon.

Caolte, and Conan, and Finn were there,  
When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,  
With Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,  
And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,  
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill  
Where passionate Maive is stony still ;  
And found on the dove-grey edge of the sea  
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode  
On a horse with bridle of findrinny ;  
And like a sunset were her lips,  
A stormy sunset on doomed ships ;  
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,  
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,  
And with the glimmering crimson glowed

Of many a figured embroidery ;  
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell  
That wavered like the summer streams,  
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

S. PATRIC

You are still wrecked among heathen dreams.

USHEEN

"Why do you wind no horn ?" she said,  
"And every hero droop his head ?  
The hornless deer is not more sad  
That many a peaceful moment had,  
More sleek than any granary mouse,  
In his own leafy forest house  
Among the waving fields of fern :  
The hunting of heroes should be glad."

"O pleasant woman," answered Finn,  
"We think on Oscar's pencilled urn,  
And on the heroes lying slain,  
On Gavra's raven-covered plain ;  
But where are your noble kith and kin,  
And from what country do you ride ?"

"My father and my mother are  
Aengus and Adene, my own name  
Niam, and my country far  
Beyond the tumbling of this tide."

"What dream came with you that you came  
Through bitter tide on foam-wet feet ?



Did your companion wander away  
From where the birds of Aengus wing ? ”

Thereon did she look haughty and sweet :  
“ I have not yet, war-weary king,  
Been spoken of with any man ;  
Yet now I choose, for these four feet  
Ran through the foam and ran to this  
That I might have your son to kiss.”

“ Were there no better than my son  
That you through all that foam should run ? ”

“ I loved no man, though kings besought,  
Until the Danaan poets brought  
Rhyme, that rhymed to Usheen’s name,  
And now I am dizzy with the thought  
Of all that wisdom and the fame  
Of battles broken by his hands,  
Of stories builded by his words  
That are like coloured Asian birds  
At evening in their rainless lands.”

O Patric, by your brazen bell,  
There was no limb of mine but fell  
Into a desperate gulph of love !  
“ You only will I wed,” I cried,  
“ And I will make a thousand songs,  
And set your name all names above,  
And captives bound with leathern thongs  
Shall kneel and praise you, one by one,  
At evening in my western dun.”

" O Usheen, mount by me and ride  
To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,  
Where men have heaped no burial mounds,  
And the days pass by like a wayward tune,  
Where broken faith has never been known,  
And the blushes of first love never have flown ;  
And there I will give you a hundred hounds ;  
No mightier creatures bay at the moon ;  
And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,  
And a hundred calves and a hundred sheep  
Whose long wool whiter than sea-froth flows,  
And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,  
And oil and wine and honey and milk,  
And always never-anxious sleep ;  
While a hundred youths, mighty of limb,  
But knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife,  
And a hundred ladies, merry as birds,  
Who when they dance to a fitful measure  
Have a speed like the speed of the salmon herds,  
Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,  
And you shall know the Danaan leisure :  
And Niam be with you for a wife."  
Then she sighed gently, " It grows late,  
Music and love and sleep await,  
Where I would be when the white moon climbs,  
The red sun falls and the world grows dim."

And then I mounted and she bound me  
With her triumphing arms around me,  
And whispering to herself enwound me ;  
But when the horse had felt my weight,  
He shook himself and neighed three times :  
Caolte, Conan, and Finn came near,

And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,  
And bid me stay, with many a tear ;  
But we rode out from the human lands.

In what far kingdom do you go,  
Ah, Fenians, with the shield and bow ?  
Or are you phantoms white as snow,  
Whose lips had life's most prosperous glow ?  
O you, with whom in sloping valleys,  
Or down the dewy forest alleys,  
I chased at morn the flying deer,  
With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,  
And heard the foemen's bucklers rattle,  
And broke the heaving ranks of battle !  
And Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,  
Where are you with your long rough hair ?  
You go not where the red deer feeds,  
Nor tear the foemen from their steeds.

S. PATRIC

Boast not, nor mourn with drooping head  
Companions long accurst and dead,  
And hounds for centuries dust and air.

USHEEN

We galloped over the glossy sea :  
I know not if days passed or hours,  
And Niam sang continually  
Danaan songs, and their dewy showers  
Of pensive laughter, unhuman sound,  
Lulled weariness, and softly round  
My human sorrow her white arms wound.

We galloped ; now a hornless deer  
Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound  
All pearly white, save one red ear ;  
And now a lady rode like the wind  
With an apple of gold in her tossing hand ;  
And a beautiful young man followed behind  
With quenchless gaze and fluttering hair.

“ Were these two born in the Danaan land,  
Or have they breathed the mortal air ? ”

“ Vex them no longer,” Niam said,  
And sighing bowed her gentle head,  
And sighing laid the pearly tip  
Of one long finger on my lip.

But now the moon like a white rose shone  
In the pale west, and the sun’s rim sank,  
And clouds arrayed their rank on rank  
About his fading crimson ball ;  
The floor of Allen’s hosting hall  
Was not more level than the sea,  
As full of loving phantasy,  
And with low murmurs we rode on,  
Where many a trumpet-twisted shell  
That in immortal silence sleeps  
Dreaming of her own melting hues,  
Her golds, her ambers, and her blues,  
Pierced with soft light the shallowing deeps.  
But now a wandering land breeze came  
And a far sound of feathery quires ;  
It seemed to blow from the dying flame,  
They seemed to sing in the smouldering fires.  
The horse towards the music raced,

Neighing along the lifeless waste ;  
Like sooty fingers, many a tree  
Rose ever out of the warm sca ;  
And they were trembling ceaselessly,  
As though they all were beating time,  
Upon the centre of the sun,  
To that low laughing woodland rhyme.  
And, now our wandering hours were done,  
We cantered to the shore, and knew  
The reason of the trembling trees :  
Round every branch the song-birds flew,  
Or clung thereon like swarming bees ;  
While round the shore a million stood  
Like drops of frozen rainbow light,  
And pondered in a soft vain mood  
Upon their shadows in the tide,  
And told the purple deeps their pride,  
And murmured snatches of delight ;  
And on the shores were many boats  
With bending sterns and bending bows,  
And carven figures on their prows  
Of bitterns, and fish-eating stoats,  
And swans with their exultant throats :  
And where the wood and waters meet  
We tied the horse in a leafy clump,  
And Niam blew three merry notes  
Out of a little silver trump ;  
And then an answering whispering flew  
Over the bare and woody land,  
A whisper of impetuous feet,  
And ever nearer, nearer grew ;  
And from the woods rushed out a band  
Of men and ladies, hand in hand,

And singing, singing all together ;  
Their brows were white as fragrant milk,  
Their cloaks made out of yellow silk,  
And trimmed with many a crimson feather ;  
And when they saw the cloak I wore  
Was dim with mire of a mortal shore,  
They fingered it and gazed on me  
And laughed like murmurs of the sea ;  
But Niam with a swift distress  
Bid them away and hold their peace ;  
And when they heard her voice they ran  
And knelt there, every girl and man  
And kissed, as they would never cease,  
Her pearl-pale hand and the hem of her dress.  
She bade them bring us to the hall  
Where Aengus dreams, from sun to sun,  
A Druid dream of the end of days  
When the stars are to wane and the world be done.

They led us by long and shadowy ways  
Where drops of dew in myriads fall,  
And tangled creepers every hour  
Blossom in some new crimson flower,  
And once a sudden laughter sprang  
From all their lips, and once they sang  
Together, while the dark woods rang,  
And made in all their distant parts,  
With boom of bees in honey marts,  
A rumour of delighted hearts.  
And once a lady by my side  
Gave me a harp, and bid me sing,  
And touch the laughing silver string ;  
But when I sang of human joy

A sorrow wrapped each merry face,  
And, Patric ! by your beard, they wept,  
Until one came, a tearful boy ;  
“ A sadder creature never stept  
Than this strange human bard,” he cried ;  
And caught the silver harp away,  
And, weeping over the white strings, hurled  
It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place  
That kept dim waters from the sky ;  
And each one said, with a long, long sigh,  
“ O saddest harp in all the world,  
Sleep there till the moon and the stars die ! ”

And now still sad we came to where  
A beautiful young man dreamed within  
A house of wattles, clay, and skin ;  
One hand upheld his beardless chin,  
And one a sceptre flashing out  
Wild flames of red and gold and blue,  
Like to a merry wandering rout  
Of dancers leaping in the air ;  
And men and ladies knelt them there  
And showed their eyes with teardrops dim,  
And with low murmurs prayed to him,  
And kissed the sceptre with red lips,  
And touched it with their finger-tips.

He held that flashing sceptre up.  
“ Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,  
And fills with stars night’s purple cup,  
And wakes the sluggard seeds of corn,  
And stirs the young kid’s budding horn  
And makes the infant ferns unwrap,

And for the peewit paints his cap,  
And rolls along the unwieldy sun,  
And makes the little planets run :  
And if joy were not on the earth,  
There were an end of change and birth,  
And Earth and Heaven and Hell would die,  
And in some gloomy barrow lie  
Folded like a frozen fly ;  
Then mock at Death and Time with glances  
And wavering arms and wandering dances.

“ Men’s hearts of old were drops of flame  
That from the *saffron morning* came,  
Or drops of silver joy that fell  
Out of the moon’s pale twisted shell ;  
But now hearts cry that hearts are slaves,  
And toss and turn in narrow caves ;  
But here there is nor law nor rule,  
Nor have hands held a weary tool ;  
And here there is nor Change nor Death,  
But only kind and merry breath,  
For joy is God and God is joy.”  
With one long glance for girl and boy  
And the pale blossom of the moon,  
He fell into a Druid swoon.

And in a wild and sudden dance  
We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance  
And swept out of the wattled hall  
And came to where the dewdrops fall  
Among the foamdrops of the sea,  
And there we hushed the revelry ;  
And, gathering on our brows a frown,  
Bent all our swaying bodies down,



And to the waves that glimmer by  
That sloping green De Danaan sod  
Sang, "God is joy and joy is God.  
And things that have grown sad are wicked,  
And things that fear the dawn of the morrow  
Or the grey wandering osprey Sorrow."

We danced to where in the winding thicket  
The damask roses, bloom on bloom,  
Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom,  
And bending over them softly said,  
Bending over them in the dance,  
With a swift and friendly glance  
From dewy eyes : "Upon the dead  
Fall the leaves of other roses,  
On the dead dim earth encloses :  
But never, never on our graves,  
Heaped beside the glimmering waves,  
Shall fall the leaves of damask roses.  
For neither Death nor Change comes near us,  
And all listless hours fear us,  
And we fear no dawning morrow,  
Nor the grey wandering osprey Sorrow."

The dance wound through the windless woods ;  
The ever-summered solitudes ;  
Until the tossing arms grew still  
Upon the woody central hill ;  
And, gathered in a panting band,  
We flung on high each waving hand,  
And sang unto the starry broods.  
In our raised eyes there flashed a glow  
Of milky brightness to and fro

As thus our song arose : " You stars,  
Across your wandering ruby cars  
Shake the loose reins : you slaves of God,  
He rules you with an iron rod,  
He holds you with an iron bond,  
Each one woven to the other,  
Each one woven to his brother  
Like bubbles in a frozen pond ;  
But we in a lonely land abide  
Unchainable as the dim tide,  
With hearts that know nor law nor rule,  
And hands that hold no wearisome tool,  
Folded in love that fears no morrow,  
Nor the grey wandering osprey Sorrow."

O Patric ! for a hundred years  
I chased upon that woody shore  
The deer, the badger, and the boar.  
O Patric ! for a hundred years  
At evening on the glimmering sands,  
Beside the piled-up hunting spears,  
These now outworn and withered hands  
Wrestled among the island bands.  
O Patric ! for a hundred years  
We went a-fishing in long boats  
With bending sterns and bending bows,  
And carven figures on their prows  
Of bitterns and fish-eating stoats.  
O Patric ! for a hundred years  
The gentle Niam was my wife ;  
But now two things devour my life ;  
The things that most of all I hate ;  
Fasting and prayers.

S. PATRIC

Tell on.

USHEEN

Yes, yes,  
For these were ancient Usheen's fate  
Loosed long ago from Heaven's gate,  
For his last days to lie in wait.

When one day by the tide I stood,  
I found in that forgetfulness  
Of dreamy foam a staff of wood  
From some dead warrior's broken lance :  
I turned it in my hands ; the stains  
Of war were on it, and I wept,  
Remembering how the Fenians stept  
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,  
Equal to good or grievous chance :  
Thereon young Niam softly came  
And caught my hands, but spake no word  
Save only many times my name,  
In murmurs, like a frightened bird.  
We passed by woods, and lawns of clover,  
And found the horse and bridled him,  
For we knew well the old was over.  
I heard one say, " His eyes grow dim  
With all the ancient sorrow of men " ;  
And wrapped in dreams rode out again  
With hoofs of the pale findrinny  
Over the glimmering purple sea :  
Under the golden evening light.

The immortals moved among the fountains  
By rivers and the woods' old night ;  
Some danced like shadows on the mountains,  
Some wandered ever hand in hand ;  
Or sat in dreams on the pale strand,  
Each forehead like an obscure star  
Bent down above each hooked knee,  
And sang, and with a dreamy gaze  
Watched where the sun in a saffron blaze  
Was slumbering half in the sea-ways ;  
And, as they sang, the painted birds  
Kept time with their bright wings and feet ;  
Like drops of honey came their words,  
But fainter than a young lamb's bleat.

" An old man stirs the fire to a blaze,  
In the house of a child, of a friend, of a brother  
He has over-lingered his welcome ; the days,  
Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each other ;  
He hears the storm in the chimney above,  
And bends to the fire and shakes with the cold,  
While his heart still dreams of battle and love,  
And the cry of the hounds on the hills of old.

" But we are apart in the grassy places,  
Where care cannot trouble the least of our days,  
Or the softness of youth be gone from our faces,  
Or love's first tenderness die in our gaze.  
The hare grows old as she plays in the sun  
And gazes around her with eyes of brightness ;  
Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done  
She limps along in an aged whiteness ;  
A storm of birds in the Asian trees

Like tulips in the air a-winging,  
And the gentle waves of the summer seas,  
That raise their heads and wander singing,  
Must murmur at last ' Unjust, unjust ' ;  
And ' My speed is a weariness,' falters the mouse,  
And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust,  
And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house.  
But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day  
When God shall come from the sea with a sigh  
And bid the stars drop down from the sky,  
And the moon like a pale rose wither away."

## BOOK II

Now, man of croziers, shadows called our names  
And then away, away, like whirling flames ;  
And now fled by, mist-covered, without sound,  
The youth and lady and the deer and hound ;  
“ Gaze no more on the phantoms,” Niam said,  
And kissed my eyes, and, swaying her bright head  
And her bright body, sang of faery and man  
Before God was or my old line began ;  
Wars shadowy, vast, exultant ; faeries of old  
Who wedded men with rings of Druid gold ;  
And how those lovers never turn their eyes  
Upon the life that fades and flickers and dies,  
Yet love and kiss on dim shores far away  
Rolled round with music of the sighing spray :  
Yet sang no more, as when, like a brown bee  
That has drunk full, she crossed the misty sea  
With me in her white arms a hundred years  
Before this day ; for now the fall of tears  
Troubled her song.

I do not know if days  
Or hours passed by, yet hold the morning rays  
Shone many times among the glimmering flowers  
Woven into her hair, before dark towers  
Rose in the darkness, and the white surf gleamed  
About them ; and the horse of faery screamed  
And shivered, knowing the Isle of Many Fears,  
Nor ceased until white Niam stroked his ears  
And named him by sweet names.

A foaming tide  
Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and wide,  
Burst from a great door marred by many a blow

From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago  
When gods and giants warred. We rode between  
The seaweed-covered pillars ; and the green  
And surging phosphorus alone gave light  
On our dark pathway, till a countless flight  
Of moonlit steps glimmered ; and left and right  
Dark statues glimmered over the pale tide  
Upon dark thrones. Between the lids of one  
The imaged meteors had flashed and run  
And had disported in the stilly jet,  
And the fixed stars had dawned and shone and set,  
Since God made Time and Death and Sleep : the  
other

Stretched his long arm to where, a misty smother,  
The stream churned, churned, and churned—his lips  
apart,

As though he told his never-slumbering heart  
Of every foamdrop on its misty way.  
Tying the horse to his vast foot that lay  
Half in the unvesselled sea, we climbed the stairs  
And climbed so long, I thought the last steps were  
Hung from the morning star ; when these mild  
words

Fanned the delighted air like wings of birds :  
“ My brothers spring out of their beds at morn,  
A-murmur like young partridge : with loud horn  
They chase the noontide deer ;  
And when the dew-drowned stars hang in the air  
Look to long fishing-lines, or point and pare  
An ashen hunting spear.  
O sigh, O fluttering sigh, be kind to me ;  
Flutter along the froth lips of the sea,  
And shores, the froth lips wet :

And stay a little while, and bid them weep :  
Ah, touch their blue-veined eyelids if they sleep,  
And shake their coverlet.  
When you have told how I weep endlessly,  
Flutter along the froth lips of the sea  
And home to me again,  
And in the shadow of my hair lie hid,  
And tell me that you found a man unbid,  
The saddest of all men."

A lady with soft eyes like funeral tapers,  
And face that seemed wrought out of moonlit  
vapours,  
And a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous  
As any ruddy moth, looked down on us ;  
And she with a wave-rusted chain was tied  
To two old eagles, full of ancient pride,  
That with dim eyeballs stood on either side.  
Few feathers were on their dishevelled wings,  
For their dim minds were with the ancient things.

"I bring deliverance," pearl-pale Niam said.

"Neither the living, nor the unlabouring dead,  
Nor the high gods who never lived, may fight  
My enemy and hope ; demons for fright  
Jabber and scream about him in the night ;  
For he is strong and crafty as the seas  
That sprang under the Seven Hazel Trees,  
And I must needs endure and hate and weep,  
Until the gods and demons drop asleep,  
Hearing Aed touch the mournful strings of gold."

"Is he so dreadful ?"



“ Be not over bold,  
But fly while still you may.”

And thereon I :  
“ This demon shall be battered till he die,  
And his loose bulk be thrown in the loud tide.”

“ Flee from him,” pearl-pale Niam weeping cried,  
“ For all men flee the demons ” ; but moved not  
My angry king-remembering soul one jot.  
There was no mightier soul of Heber’s line ;  
Now it is old and mouse-like. For a sign  
I burst the chain : still earless, nerveless, blind,  
Wrapped in the things of the unhuman mind,  
In some dim memory or ancient mood  
Still earless, nerveless, blind, the eagles stood.

And then we climbed the stair to a high door ;  
A hundred horsemen on the basalt floor  
Beneath had paced content : we held our way  
And stood within : clothed in a misty ray  
I saw a foam-white seagull drift and float  
Under the roof, and with a straining throat  
Shouted, and hailed him : he hung there a star,  
For no man’s cry shall ever mount so far ;  
Not even your God could have thrown down that  
hall ;  
Stabbing His unloosed lightnings in their stall,  
He had sat down and sighed with cumbered heart,  
As though His hour were come.

We sought the part  
That was most distant from the door ; green slime

Made the way slippery, and time on time  
Showed prints of sea-born scales, while down  
    through it  
The captive's journeys to and fro were writ  
Like a small river, and where feet touched, came  
A momentary gleam of phosphorus flame.  
Under the deepest shadows of the hall  
That woman found a ring hung on the wall,  
And in the ring a torch, and with its flare  
Making a world about her in the air,  
Passed under the dim doorway, out of sight  
And came again, holding a second light  
Burning between her fingers, and in mine  
Laid it and sighed : I held a sword whose shine  
No centuries could dim, and a word ran  
Thereon in Ogham letters, " Mananan " ;  
That sea-god's name, who in a deep content  
Sprang dripping, and, with captive demons sent  
Out of the sevenfold seas, built the dark hall  
Rooted in foam and clouds, and cried to all  
The mightier masters of a mightier race ;  
And at his cry there came no milk-pale face  
Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,  
But only exultant faces.

Niam stood

With bowed head, trembling when the white blade  
    shone,  
But she whose hours of tenderness were gone  
Had neither hope nor fear. I bade them hide  
Under the shadows till the tumults died  
Of the loud-crashing and earth-shaking fight,  
Lest they should look upon some dreadful sight ;

And thrust the torch between the slimy flags.  
A dome made out of endless carven jags,  
Where shadowy face flowed into shadowy face,  
Looked down on me ; and in the self-same place  
I waited hour by hour, and the high dome,  
Windowless, pillarless, multitudinous home  
Of faces, waited ; and the leisured gaze  
Was loaded with the memory of days  
Buried and mighty. When through the great door  
The dawn came in, and glimmered on the floor  
With a pale light, I journeyed round the hall  
And found a door deep sunken in the wall,  
The least of doors ; beyond on a dim plain  
A little runnel made a bubbling strain,  
And on the runnel's stony and bare edge  
A dusky demon dry as a withered sedge  
Swayed, crooning to himself an unknown tongue :  
In a sad revelry he sang and swung  
Bacchant and mournful, passing to and fro  
His hand along the runnel's side, as though  
The flowers still grew there : far on the sea's waste  
Shaking and waving, vapour vapour chased,  
While high frail cloudlets, fed with a green light,  
Like drifts of leaves, immovable and bright,  
Hung in the passionate dawn. He slowly turned :  
A demon's leisure : eyes, first white, now burned  
Like wings of kingfishers ; and he arose  
Barking. We trampled up and down with blows  
Of sword and brazen battle-axe, while day  
Gave to high noon and noon to night gave way ;  
And when he knew the sword of Mananan  
Amid the shades of night, he changed and ran  
Through many shapes ; I lunged at the smooth throat

Of a great eel ; it changed, and I but smote  
A fir-tree roaring in its leafless top ;  
And thereupon I drew the livid chop  
Of a drowned dripping body to my breast ;  
Horror from horror grew ; but when the west  
Had surged up in a plummy fire, I drave  
Through heart and spine ; and cast him in the wave  
Lest Niam shudder.

Full of hope and dread  
Those two came carrying wine and meat and  
bread,  
And healed my wounds with unguents out of flowers  
That feed white moths by some De Danaan shrine ;  
Then in that hall, lit by the dim sea-shine,  
We lay on skins of otters, and drank wine,  
Brewed by the sea-gods, from huge cups that lay  
Upon the lips of sea-gods in their day ;  
And then on heaped-up skins of otters slept.  
And when the sun once more in saffron stept,  
Rolling his flagrant wheel out of the deep,  
We sang the loves and angers without sleep,  
And all the exultant labours of the strong.

But now the lying clerics murder song  
With barren words and flatteries of the weak.  
In what land do the powerless turn the beak  
Of ravening Sorrow, or the hand of Wrath ?  
For all your croziers, they have left the path  
And wander in the storms and clinging snows,  
Hopeless for ever : ancient Usheen knows,  
For he is weak and poor and blind, and lies  
On the anvil of the world.

S. PATRIC

Be still : the skies  
Are choked with thunder, lightning, and fierce wind,  
For God has heard, and speaks His angry mind ;  
Go cast your body on the stones and pray,  
For He has wrought midnight and dawn and day.

USHEEN

Saint, do you weep ? I hear amid the thunder  
The Fenian horses ; armour torn asunder ;  
Laughter and cries. The armies clash and shock.  
And now the daylight-darkening ravens flock.  
Cease, cease, oh mournful, laughing Fenian horn !

We feasted for three days. On the fourth morn  
I found, dropping sea foam on the wide stair,  
And hung with slime, and whispering in his hair,  
That demon dull and unsubduable ;  
And once more to a day-long battle fell,  
And at the sundown threw him in the surge,  
To lie until the fourth morn saw emerge  
His new-healed shape ; and for a hundred years  
So warred, so feasted, with nor dreams nor fears,  
Nor languor nor fatigue : an endless feast,  
An endless war.

The hundred years had ceased ;  
I stood upon the stair : the surges bore  
A beech bough to me, and my heart grew sore,  
Remembering how I had stood by white-haired Finn  
Under a beech at Allen and heard the thin  
Outcry of bats.

And then young Niam came  
Holding that horse, and sadly called my name ;  
I mounted, and we passed over the lone  
And drifting greyness, while this monotone,  
Surly and distant, mixed inseparably  
Into the clangour of the wind and sea.

“ I hear my soul drop down into decay,  
And Mananan’s dark tower, stone after stone,  
Gather sea slime and fall the seaward way,  
And the moon goad the waters night and day,  
That all be overthrown.

“ But till the moon has taken all, I wage  
War on the mightiest men under the skies,  
And they have fallen or fled, age after age.  
Light is man’s love, and lighter is man’s rage ;  
His purpose drifts and dies.”

And then lost Niam murmured, “ Love, we go  
To the Island of Forgetfulness, for lo !  
The Islands of Dancing and of Victories  
Are empty of all power.”

“ And which of these  
Is the Island of Content ? ”

“ None know,” she said ;  
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.

### BOOK III

FLED foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering  
and milky smoke,  
High as the saddle girth, covering away from our  
glances the tide ;  
And those that fled, and that followed, from the  
foam-pale distance broke ;  
The immortal desire of immortals we saw in their  
faces, and sighed.

I mused on the chase with the Fenians, and Bran,  
Sgeolan, Lomair,  
And never a song sang Niam, and over my finger-  
tips  
Came now the sliding of tears and sweeping of mist-  
cold hair,  
And now the warmth of sighs, and after the quiver  
of lips.

*Were we days long or hours long in riding, when*  
rolled in a grisly peace,  
An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel and  
oak ?  
And we stood on a sea's edge we saw not ; for whiter  
than new-washed fleece  
Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering  
and milky smoke.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's edge ; the  
sea's edge barren and grey,  
Grey sand on the green of the grasses and over the  
dripping trees,

Dripping and doubling landward, as though they  
would hasten away  
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the  
moan of the seas.

But the trees grew taller and closer, immense in their  
wrinkling bark ;  
Dropping ; a murmurous dropping ; old silence  
and that one sound ;  
For no live creatures lived there, no weasels moved  
in the dark :  
Long sighs arose in our spirits, beneath us bubbled  
the ground.

And the ears of the horse went sinking away in the  
hollow night,  
For, as drift from a sailor slow drowning the gleams  
of the world and the sun,  
Ceased on our hands and our faces, on hazel and oak  
leaf, the light,  
And the stars were blotted above us, and the whole  
of the world was one.

Till the horse gave a whinny ; for, cumbrous with  
stems of the hazel and oak,  
A valley flowed down from his hoofs, and there in  
the long grass lay,  
Under the starlight and shadow, a monstrous  
slumbering folk,  
Their naked and gleaming bodies poured out and  
heaped in the way.



And by them were arrow and war-axe, arrow and  
shield and blade ;  
And dew-blanced horns, in whose hollow a child  
of three years old  
Could sleep on a couch of rushes, and all inwrought  
and inlaid,  
And more comely than man can make them with  
bronze and silver and gold.

And each of the huge white creatures was huger  
than fourscore men ;  
The tops of their ears were feathered, their hands  
were the claws of birds,  
And, shaking the plumes of the grasses and the  
leaves of the mural glen,  
The breathing came from those bodies, long-warless,  
grown whiter than curds.

The wood was so spacious above them, that He who  
has stars for His flocks  
Could fondle the leaves with His fingers, nor go from  
His dew-cumbered skies ;  
So long were they sleeping, the owls had builded  
their nests in their locks,  
Filling the fibrous dimness with long generations of  
eyes.

And over the limbs and the valley the slow owls  
wandered and came,  
Now in a place of star-fire, and now in a shadow-  
place wide ;

And the chief of the huge white creatures, his knees  
in the soft star-flame,  
Lay loose in a place of shadow : we drew the reins  
by his side.

Golden the nails of his bird-claws, flung loosely  
along the dim ground ;  
In one was a branch soft-shining with bells more  
many than sighs  
In midst of an old man's bosom ; owls ruffling and  
pacing around,  
Sidled their bodies against him, filling the shade with  
their eyes.

And my gaze was thronged with the sleepers ; no,  
not since the world began,  
In realms where the handsome were many, nor in  
glamours by demons flung,  
Have faces alive with such beauty been known to the  
salt eye of man,  
Yet weary with passions that faded when the seven-  
fold seas were young.

And I gazed on the bell-branch, sleep's forebear, far  
sung by the Sennachies.  
I saw how those slumberers, grown weary, there  
camping in grasses deep,  
Of wars with the wide world and pacing the shores  
of the wandering seas,  
Laid hands on the bell-branch and swayed it, and fed  
of unhuman sleep.

Snatching the horn of Niam, I blew a long lingering  
note.  
Came sound from those monstrous sleepers, a sound  
like the stirring of flies.  
He, shaking the fold of his lips, and heaving the  
pillar of his throat,  
Watched me with mournful wonder out of the wells  
of his eyes.

I cried, "Come out of the shadow, king of the nails  
of gold !  
And tell of your goodly household and the goodly  
works of your hands,  
That we may muse in the starlight and talk of the  
battles of old ;  
Your questioner, Usheen, is worthy, he comes from  
the Fenian lands."

Half open his eyes were, and held me, dull with the  
smoke of their dreams ;  
His lips moved slowly in answer, no answer out of  
them came ;  
Then he swayed in his fingers the bell-branch, slow  
dropping a sound in faint streams  
Softer than snow-flakes in April and piercing the  
marrow like flame.

Wrapt in the wave of that music, with weariness  
more than of earth,  
The moil of my centuries filled me ; and gone like a  
sea-covered stone

Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow and  
the memories of the whole of my mirth,  
And a softness came from the starlight and filled me  
full to the bone.

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid my body  
as low ;  
And the pearl-pale Niam lay by me, her brow on the  
midst of my breast ;  
And the horse was gone in the distance, and years  
after years 'gan flow ;  
Square leaves of the ivy moved over us, binding us  
down to our rest.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there  
I forgot ;  
How the pebbles drip blood in the battle, when the  
fallen on fallen lie rolled ;  
How the falconer follows the falcon in the weeds of  
the heron's plot,  
And the names of the demons whose hammers made  
armour for Conhor of old.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there  
I forgot ;  
That the spear-shaft is made out of ashwood, the  
shield out of osier and hide ;  
How the hammers spring on the anvil, on the spear-  
head's burning spot ;  
How the slow, blue-eyed oxen of Finn low sadly at  
evening tide.

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driving the  
dust with their throngs,  
Moved round me, of seamen or landmen, all who  
are winter tales ;  
Came by me the kings of the Red Branch, with roar-  
ing of laughter and songs,  
Or moved as they moved once, love-making or  
piercing the tempest with sails.

Came Blaid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who feastward  
of old time slunk,  
Cook Barach, the traitor ; and warward, the spittle  
on his beard never dry,  
Dark Balor, as old as a forest, car-borne, his mighty  
head sunk  
Helpless, men lifting the lids of his weary and death-  
making eye.

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved  
in loud streams,  
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her  
needle of bone.  
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought  
not, with creatures of dreams,  
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb  
as a stone.

At times our slumber was lightened. When the sun  
was on silver or gold ;  
When brushed with the wings of the owls, in the  
dimness they love going by ;

When a glow-worm was green on a grass leaf, lured  
from his lair in the mould ;  
Half wakening, we lifted our eyelids, and gazed on  
the grass with a sigh.

So watched I when, man of the croziers, at the heel  
of a century fell,  
Weak, in the midst of the meadow, from his miles in  
the midst of the air,  
A starling like them that forgathered 'neath a moon  
waking white as a shell  
When the Fenians made foray at morning with  
Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair.

I awoke : the strange horse without summons out of  
the distance ran,  
Thrusting his nose to my shoulder ; he knew in his  
bosom deep  
That once more moved in my bosom the ancient  
sadness of man,  
And that I would leave the immortals, their dimness,  
their dews dropping sleep.

O, had you seen beautiful Niam grow white as the  
waters are white,  
Lord of the croziers, you even had lifted your hands  
and wept :  
But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering  
alone that delight  
Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs  
impatiently stept.

I cried, "O Niam ! O white one ! if only a twelve-  
houred day,  
I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where  
the old men and young  
In the Fenians' dwellings of wattle lean on the chess-  
boards and play,  
Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan's slander-  
ous tongue !

"Like me were some galley forsaken far off in  
Meridian isle,  
Remembering its long-oared companions, sails  
turning to threadbare rags ;  
No more to crawl on the seas with long oars mile  
after mile,  
But to be amid shooting of flies and flowering of  
rushes and flags."

Their motionless eyeballs of spirits grown mild with  
mysterious thought,  
Watched her those seamless faces from the valley's  
glimmering girth ;  
As she murmured, "O wandering Usheen, the  
strength of the bell-branch is naught,  
For there moves alive in your fingers the fluttering  
sadness of earth.

"Then go through the lands in the saddle and see  
what the mortals do,  
And softly come to your Niam over the tops of the  
tide ;

But weep for your Niam, O Usheen, weep ; for if  
only your shoe  
Brush lightly as haymouse earth's pebbles, you will  
come no more to my side.

" O flaming lion of the world, O when will you  
turn to your rest ? "

I saw from a distant saddle ; from the earth she  
made her moan ;

" I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn,  
for breast unto breast  
We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their  
sweetness lone

" In the isles of the farthest seas where only the  
spirits come.  
Were the winds less soft than the breath of a pigeon  
who sleeps on her nest,  
Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound of the  
sea's vague drum ?  
O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn  
to your rest ? "

The wailing grew distant ; I rode by the woods of  
the wrinkling bark,  
Where ever is murmurous dropping, old silence and  
that one sound ;  
For no live creatures live there, no weasels move in  
the dark ;  
In a reverie forgetful of all things, over the bubbling  
ground.



And I rode by the plains of the sea's edge, where all  
is barren and grey,  
Grey sands on the green of the grasses and over the  
dripping trees,  
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they  
would hasten away,  
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the  
moan of the seas.

And the winds made the sands on the sea's edge  
turning and turning go,  
As my mind made the names of the Fenians. Far  
from the hazel and oak,  
I rode away on the surges, where, high as the saddle  
bow,  
Fled foam underneath me, and round me, a wandering  
and milky smoke.

Long fled the foam-flakes around me, the winds fled  
out of the vast,  
Snatching the bird in secret ; nor knew I, embosomed  
apart,  
When they froze the cloth on my body like armour  
riveted fast,  
For Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in  
the gates of my heart.

Till fattening the winds of the morning, an odour  
of new-mown hay  
Came, and my forehead fell low, and my tears like  
berries fell down ;

Later a sound came, half lost in the sound of a shore  
far away,  
From the great grass-barnacle calling, and later the  
shore-weeds brown.

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs crushing  
the sand and the shells,  
Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes, a chaunt  
of love on my lips,  
Not coughing, my head on my knees, and praying,  
and wroth with the bells,  
I would leave no saint's head on his body from  
Rachlin to Bera of ships.

Making way from the kindling surges, I rode on a  
bridle-path  
Much wondering to see upon all hands, of wattles  
and woodwork made,  
Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless the  
sacred cairn and the rath,  
And a small and a feeble populace stooping with  
mattock and spade,

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining with  
much-toil wet ;  
While in this place and that place, with bodies  
unglorious, their chieftains stood,  
Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered one,  
caught in your net :  
Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the  
roaring of wind in a wood.

And because I went by them so huge and so speedy  
with eyes so bright,  
Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old man  
lifted his head :  
And I rode and I rode, and I cried out, " The  
Fenians hunt wolves in the night,  
So sleep thee by daytime." A voice cried, " The  
Fenians a long time are dead."

A whitebeard stood hushed on the pathway, the  
flesh of his face as dried grass,  
And in folds round his eyes and his mouth, he sad as  
a child without milk ;  
And the dreams of the islands were gone, and I knew  
how men sorrow and pass,  
And their hound, and their horse, and their love, and  
their eyes that glimmer like silk.

And wrapping my face in my hair, I murmured,  
" In old age they ceased " ;  
And my tears were larger than berries, and I mur-  
mured, " Where white clouds lie spread  
On Crevroe or broad Knockfelin, with many of old  
they feast  
On the floors of the gods." He cried, " No, the  
gods a long time are dead."

And lonely and longing for Niam, I shivered and  
turned me about,  
The heart in me longing to leap like a grasshopper  
into her heart ;

I turned and rode to the westward, and followed the  
sea's old shout  
Till I saw where Maive lies sleeping till starlight and  
midnight part.

And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a  
sack full of sand,  
They bore it with staggering and sweating, but fell  
with their burden at length.  
Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle, I flung  
it five yards with my hand,  
With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob for the  
Fenian's old strength.

The rest you have heard of, O croziered man ; how,  
when divided the girth,  
I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a  
summer fly ;  
And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose,  
and walked on the earth,  
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on  
his beard never dry.

How the men of the sand-sack showed me a church  
with its belfry in air ;  
Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in my  
dim eyes the crozier gleams ;  
What place have Caolte and Conan, and Bran,  
Sgeolan, Lomair ?  
Speak, you too are old with your memories, an old  
man surrounded with dreams.

S. PATRIC

Where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the  
burning stones is their place ;  
Where the demons whip them with wires on the  
burning stones of wide Hell,  
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and the  
smile on God's face,  
Between them a gateway of brass, and the howl of  
the angels who fell.

USHEEN

Put the staff in my hands ; for I go to the Fenians,  
O cleric, to chaunt  
The war-songs that roused them of old ; they will  
rise, making clouds with their breath,  
Innumerable, singing, exultant ; the clay under-  
neath them shall pant,  
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled  
beneath them in death.

And demons afraid in their darkness ; deep horror  
of eyes and of wings,  
Afraid their ears on the earth laid, shall listen and  
rise up and weep ;  
Hearing the shaking of shields and the quiver of  
stretched bowstrings,  
Hearing Hell loud with a murmur, as shouting and  
mocking we sweep.

We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter the  
gateway of brass  
And enter, and none sayeth " No " when there enters  
the strongly armed guest ;

Make clean as a broom cleans, and march on as oxen  
move over young grass ;  
Then feast, making converse of wars, and of old  
wounds, and turn to our rest.

S. PATRIC

On the flaming stones, without refuge, the limbs of  
the Fenians are tost ;  
None war on the masters of Hell, who could break  
up the world in their rage ;  
But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your  
soul that is lost  
Through the demon love of its youth and its godless  
and passionate age.

USHEEN

Ah, me ! to be shaken with coughing and broken  
with old age and pain,  
Without laughter, a show unto children, alone with  
remembrance and fear ;  
All emptied of purple hours as a beggar's cloak in  
the rain,  
As a hay-cock out on the flood, or a wolf sucked  
under a weir.

It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man I loved  
of old there ;  
I throw down the chain of small stones ! when life  
in my body has ceased,  
I will go to Caolte, and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan,  
Lomair,  
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in  
flames or at feast.

FROM "CROSSWAYS"  
(1889)





## THE INDIAN UPON GOD

I PASSED along the water's edge below the humid  
trees,  
My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes round  
my knees,  
My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs ; and saw the  
moorfowl pace  
All dripping on a grassy slope, and saw them cease to  
chase  
Each other round in circles, and heard the eldest  
speak :  
*Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong  
or weak  
Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.  
The rains are from His dripping wing, the moonbeams  
from His eye.*  
I passed a little further on and heard a lotus talk :  
*Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk,  
For I am in His image made, and all this tinkling tide  
Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.*  
A little way within the gloom a roebuck raised his  
eyes  
Brimful of starlight, and he said : *The Stamper of the  
Skies,*  
*He is a gentle roebuck ; for how else, I pray, could He  
Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing like me ?*  
I passed a little further on and heard a peacock say :  
*Who made the grass and made the worms and made my  
feathers gay,*  
*He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all the night  
His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light.*

## THE STOLEN CHILD

WHERE dips the rocky highland  
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,  
There lies a leafy island  
Where flapping herons wake  
The drowsy water rats ;  
There we've hid our faery vats,  
Full of berries,  
And of reddest stolen cherries.  
*Come away, O human child !  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can  
stand.*

Where the wave of moonlight glosses  
The dim grey sands with light,  
Far off by furthest Rosses  
We foot it all the night,  
Weaving olden dances,  
Mingling hands and mingling glances  
Till the moon has taken flight ;  
To and fro we leap  
And chase the frothy bubbles,  
While the world is full of troubles  
And is anxious in its sleep.  
*Come away, O human child !  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can  
stand.*

Where the wandering water gushes  
From the hills above Glen-Car,  
In pools among the rushes  
That scarce could bathe a star,  
We seek for slumbering trout  
And whispering in their ears  
Give them unquiet dreams ;  
Leaning softly out  
From ferns that drop their tears  
Over the young streams.  
*Come away, O human child !  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can under-  
stand.*

Away with us he's going,  
The solemn-eyed :  
He'll hear no more the lowing  
Of the calves on the warm hillside  
Or the kettle on the hob  
Sing peace into his breast,  
Or see the brown mice bob  
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.  
*For he comes, the human child,  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
From a world more full of weeping than he can understand.*

TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER

SHY one, shy one,  
Shy one of my heart,  
She moves in the firelight  
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,  
And lays them in a row.  
To an isle in the water  
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,  
And lights the curtained room,  
Shy in the doorway  
And shy in the gloom ;

And shy as a rabbit,  
Helpful and shy.  
To an isle in the water  
With her would I fly.

## DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet ;  
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white  
feet.

She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the  
tree ;

But I, being young and foolish, with her would not  
agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,  
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white  
hand.

She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the  
weirs ;

But I was young and foolish, and now am full of  
tears.



FROM "THE ROSE"  
(1893)





## THE ROSE OF THE WORLD

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream ?  
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,  
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,  
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by :  
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place  
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,  
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,  
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode :  
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,  
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat ;  
He made the world to be a grassy road  
Before her wandering feet.

## A FAERY SONG

*Sung by the people of faery over Diarmuid and Grania, in their bridal  
sleep under a Cromlech.*

WE who are old, old and gay,  
O so old !  
Thousands of years, thousands of years,  
If all were told :

Give to these children, new from the world,  
Silence and love ;  
And the long dew-dropping hours of the night,  
And the stars above :

Give to these children, new from the world,  
Rest far from men.  
Is anything better, anything better ?  
Tell us it then :

Us who are old, old and gay,  
O so old !  
Thousands of years, thousands of years,  
If all were told.

## THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I WILL arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles  
made :

Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the  
honey bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes  
dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where  
the cricket sings ;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple  
glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the  
shore ;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements  
grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

## A CRADLE SONG

THE angels are stooping  
Above your bed ;  
They weary of trooping  
With the whimpering dead.

God's laughing in Heaven  
To see you so good ;  
The Sailing Seven  
Are gay with His mood.

I sigh that kiss you,  
For I must own  
That I shall miss you  
When you have grown.

## THE SORROW OF LOVE

THE brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,  
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips  
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers ;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
Could but compose man's image and his cry.

## WHEN YOU ARE OLD

WHEN you are old and grey and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep ;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true ;  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

## THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair ;  
His heart hung all upon a silken dress,  
And he had known at last some tenderness,  
Before earth took him to her stony care ;  
But when a man poured fish into a pile,  
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,  
And sang what gold morning or evening sheds  
Upon a woven world-forgotten isle  
Where people love beside the ravelled seas ;  
That Time can never mar a lover's vows  
Under that woven changeless roof of boughs :  
The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lissadell ;  
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,  
And he had known at last some prudent years  
Before they heaped his grave under the hill ;  
But while he passed before a plashy place,  
A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth  
Sang that somewhere to north or west or south  
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race  
Under the golden or the silver skies ;  
That if a dancer stayed his hungry foot  
It seemed the sun and moon were in the fruit :  
And at that singing he was no more wise.

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,  
He mused upon his mockers : without fail  
His sudden vengeance were a country tale,

When earthy night had drunk his body in ;  
But one small knot-grass growing by the pool  
Sang where—unnecessary cruel voice—  
Old silence bids its chosen race rejoice,  
Whatever ravelled waters rise and fall  
Or stormy silver fret the gold of day,  
And midnight there enfold them like a fleece  
And lover there by lover be at peace.  
The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall ;  
And might have known at last unhaunted sleep  
Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,  
Now that the earth had taken man and all :  
Did not the worms that spired about his bones  
Proclaim with that unwearied, reedy cry  
That God has laid His fingers on the sky,  
That from those fingers glittering summer runs  
Upon the dancer by the dreamless wave.  
Why should those lovers that no lovers miss  
Dream, until God burn Nature with a kiss ?  
The man has found no comfort in the grave.



## THE TWO TREES

BELOVED, gaze in thine own heart,  
The holy tree is growing there ;  
From joy the holy branches start,  
And all the trembling flowers they bear.  
The changing colours of its fruit  
Have dowered the stars with merry light ;  
The surety of its hidden root  
Has planted quiet in the night ;  
The shaking of its leafy head  
Has given the waves their melody,  
And made my lips and music wed,  
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.  
There the Loves—a circle—go,  
The flaming circle of our days,  
Gyring, spiring to and fro  
In those great ignorant leafy ways ;  
Remembering all that shaken hair  
And how the wingèd sandals dart,  
Thine eyes grow full of tender care :  
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

Gaze no more in the bitter glass  
The demons, with their subtle guile,  
Lift up before us when they pass,  
Or only gaze a little while ;  
For there a fatal image grows  
That the stormy night receives,  
Roots half hidden under snows,  
Broken boughs and blackened leaves.  
For all things turn to barrenness  
In the dim glass the demons hold,

The glass of outer weariness,  
Made when God slept in times of old.  
There, through the broken branches, go  
The ravens of unresting thought ;  
Flying, crying to and fro,  
Cruel claw and hungry throat,  
Or else they stand and sniff the wind,  
And shake their ragged wings ; alas !  
Thy tender eyes grow all unkind :  
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

## TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES

*KNOW, that I would accounted be  
True brother of that company,  
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,  
Ballad and story, rann and song ;  
Nor be I any less of them,  
Because the red-rose-bordered hem  
Of her, whose history began  
Before God made the angelic clan,  
Trails all about the written page.  
When Time began to rant and rage  
The measure of her flying feet  
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat ;  
And Time bade all his candles flare  
To light a measure here and there ;  
And may the thoughts of Ireland brood  
Upon a measured quietude.*

*Nor may I less be counted one  
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,  
Because to him, who ponders well,  
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
Of things discovered in the deep,  
Where only body's laid asleep.  
For the elemental creatures go  
About my table to and fro,  
That hurry from unmeasured mind  
To rant and rage in flood and wind ;  
Yet he who treads in measured ways  
May surely barter gaze for gaze.  
Man ever journeys on with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*

*Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,  
A Druid land, a Druid tune !*

*While still I may, I write for you  
The love I lived, the dream I knew.  
From our birthday, until we die,  
Is but the winking of an eye ;  
And we, our singing and our love,  
What measurer Time has lit above,  
And all benighted things that go  
About my table to and fro,  
Are passing on to where may be,  
In truth's consuming ecstasy,  
No place for love and dream at all ;  
For God goes by with white foot-fall.  
I cast my heart into my rhymes,  
That you, in the dim coming times,  
May know how my heart went with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*

FROM  
“THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS”  
(1899)



## THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE

THE host is riding from Knocknarea  
And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare ;  
Caolte tossing his burning hair  
And Niam calling *Away, come away :*  
*Empty your heart of its mortal dream.*  
*The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,*  
*Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,*  
*Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a gleam,*  
*Our arms are waving, our lips are apart ;*  
*And if any gaze on our rushing band,*  
*We come between him and the deed of his hand,*  
*We come between him and the hope of his heart.*  
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,  
And where is there hope or deed as fair ?  
Caolte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niam calling *Away, come away.*

## THE EVERLASTING VOICES

O SWEET everlasting Voices, be still ;  
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold  
And bid them wander obeying your will,  
Flame under flame, till Time be no more ;  
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,  
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,  
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore ?  
O sweet everlasting Voices, be still.



## THE UNAPPEASABLE HOST

THE Danaan children laugh, in cradles of wrought  
gold,  
And clap their hands together, and half close their  
eyes,  
For they will ride the North when the ger-eagle flies,  
With heavy whitening wings, and a heart fallen cold :  
I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,  
And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me.  
Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea ;  
Desolate winds that hover in the flaming West ;  
Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and  
beat  
The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimper-  
ing ghost ;  
O heart the winds have shaken ; the unappeasable  
host  
Is comelier than candles at Mother Mary's feet.

## INTO THE TWILIGHT

OUT-WORN heart, in a time out-worn,  
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right ;  
Laugh, heart, again in the grey twilight,  
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,  
Dew ever shining and twilight grey ;  
Though hope fall from you and love decay,  
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill :  
For there the mystical brotherhood  
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood  
And river and stream work out their will ;

And God stands winding His lonely horn,  
And time and the world are ever in flight ;  
And love is less kind than the grey twilight,  
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

## THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

I WENT out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread ;  
And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire aflame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And some one called me by my name :  
It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name and ran  
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands ;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

## THE SONG OF THE OLD MOTHER

I RISE in the dawn, and I kneel and blow  
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow ;  
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep  
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep ;  
And the young lie long and dream in their bed  
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,  
And their day goes over in idleness,  
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress :  
While I must work because I am old,  
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

## HE BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE

I HEAR the Shadowy Horses, their long manes  
a-shake,  
Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering  
white ;  
The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping  
night,  
The East her hidden joy before the morning break,  
The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,  
The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire :  
O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,  
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay :  
Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat  
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,  
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,  
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous  
feet.

### HE REPROVES THE CURLEW

O, CURLEW, cry no more in the air,  
Or only to the water in the West ;  
Because your crying brings to my mind  
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair  
That was shaken out over my breast :  
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

## HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY

WHEN my arms wrap you round I press  
My heart upon the loveliness  
That has long faded from the world ;  
The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled  
In shadowy pools, when armies fled ;  
The love-tales wrought with silken thread  
By dreaming ladies upon cloth  
That has made fat the murderous moth ;  
The roses that of old time were  
Woven by ladies in their hair,  
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore  
Through many a sacred corridor  
Where such grey clouds of incense rose  
That only God's eyes did not close :  
For that pale breast and lingering hand  
Come from a more dream-heavy land,  
A more dream-heavy hour than this ;  
And when you sigh from kiss to kiss  
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,  
For hours when all must fade like dew,  
But flame on flame, and deep on deep,  
Throne over throne where in half sleep,  
Their swords upon their iron knees,  
Brood her high lonely mysteries.

TO HIS HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE NO FEAR

BE you still, be you still, trembling heart ;  
Remember the wisdom out of the old days :  
*Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,  
And the winds that blow through the starry ways,  
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood  
Cover over and hide, for he has no part  
With the lonely, majestic multitude.*



## THE CAP AND BELLS

THE jester walked in the garden :  
The garden had fallen still ;  
He bade his soul rise upward  
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,  
When owls began to call :  
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking  
Of a quiet and light footfall ;

But the young queen would not listen ;  
She rose in her pale night-gown ;  
She drew in the heavy casement  
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,  
When the owls called out no more ;  
In a red and quivering garment  
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming  
Of a flutter of flower-like hair ;  
But she took up her fan from the table  
And waved it off on the air.

“ I have cap and bells,” he pondered,  
“ I will send them to her and die ” ;  
And when the morning whitened  
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,  
Under a cloud of her hair,  
And her red lips sang them a love-song :  
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,  
And the heart and the soul came through,  
To her right hand came the red one,  
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,  
A chattering wise and sweet,  
And her hair was a folded flower  
And the quiet of love in her feet.

THE LOVER PLEADS WITH HIS FRIEND FOR  
OLD FRIENDS

THOUGH you are in your shining days,  
Voices among the crowd  
And new friends busy with your praise,  
Be not unkind or proud,  
But think about old friends the most :  
Time's bitter flood will rise,  
Your beauty perish and be lost  
For all eyes but these eyes.

## HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet :  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams ;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet ;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

## THE FIDDLER OF DOONEY

WHEN I play on my fiddle in Dooney,  
Folk dance like a wave of the sea ;  
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,  
My brother in Mocharabuicee.

I passed my brother and cousin :  
They read in their books of prayer ;  
I read in my book of songs  
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time,  
To Peter sitting in state,  
He will smile on the three old spirits,  
But call me first through the gate ;

For the good are always the merry,  
Save by an evil chance,  
And the merry love the fiddle  
And the merry love to dance :

And when the folk there spy me,  
They will all come up to me,  
With " Here is the fiddler of Dooney ! "  
And dance like a wave of the sea.



BAILE AND AILLINN  
(1903)





## BAILE AND AILLINN

*Argument.* Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.

*I HARDLY hear the curlew cry,  
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,  
Before my thoughts begin to run  
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,  
Baile, who had the honey mouth ;  
And that mild woman of the south,  
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.  
Their love was never drowned in care  
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold  
Because their bodies had grown old.  
Being forbid to marry on earth,  
They blossomed to immortal mirth.*

About the time when Christ was born,  
When the long wars for the White Horn  
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,  
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some  
Called rather Baile Little-Land,  
Rode out of Emain with a band  
Of harpers and young men ; and they  
Imagined, as they struck the way  
To many-pastured Muirthemne,  
That all things fell out happily,  
And there, for all that fools had said,  
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.

They found an old man running there :  
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair ;

He had knees that stuck out of his hose ;  
He had puddle water in his shoes ;  
He had half a cloak to keep him dry,  
Although he had a squirrel's eye.

*O wandering birds and rushy beds,  
You put such folly in our heads  
With all this crying in the wind ,  
No common love is to our mind,  
And our poor Kate or Nan is less  
Than any whose unhappiness  
Awoke the harp-strings long ago.  
Yet they that know all things but know  
That all this life can give us is  
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.  
Who was it put so great a scorn  
In the grey reeds that night and morn  
Are trodden and broken by the herds,  
And in the light bodies of birds  
That north wind tumbles to and fro  
And pinches among hail and snow ?*

That runner said : " I am from the south ;  
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,  
To tell him how the girl Aillinn  
Rode from the country of her kin,  
And old and young men rode with her :  
For all that country had been astir  
If anybody half as fair  
Had chosen a husband anywhere  
But where it could see her every day.  
When they had ridden a little way

An old man caught the horse's head  
With : ' You must home again, and wed  
With somebody in your own land.'  
A young man cried and kissed her hand,  
' O lady, wed with one of us ' ;  
And when no face grew piteous  
For any gentle thing she spake,  
She fell and died of the heart-break."

Because a lover's heart's worn out,  
Being tumbled and blown about  
By its own blind imagining,  
And will believe that anything  
That is bad enough to be true, is true,  
Baile's heart was broken in two ;  
And he, being laid upon green boughs,  
Was carried to the goodly house  
Where the Hound of Ulad sat before  
The brazen pillars of his door,  
His face bowed low to weep the end  
Of the harper's daughter and her friend.  
For although years had passed away  
He always wept them on that day,  
For on that day they had been betrayed ;  
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid  
Under a cairn of sleepy stone  
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,  
Although he is carrying stone, but two  
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

*We hold because our memory is  
So full of that thing and of this*

*That out of sight is out of mind.  
But the grey rush under the wind  
And the grey bird with crooked bill  
Have such long memories, that they still  
Remember Deirdre and her man ;  
And when we walk with Kate or Nan  
About the windy water side,  
Our hearts can hear the voices chide.  
How could we be so soon content,  
Who know the way that Naoise went ?  
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,  
Who being lovely was so wise—  
Ah ! wise, my heart knows well how wise.*

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,  
Gathering his cloak about him, run  
Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids,  
Who amid leafy lights and shades  
Dreamed of the hands that would unlace  
Their bodices in some dim place  
When they had come to the marriage bed ;  
And harpers, pacing with high head  
As though their music were enough  
To make the savage heart of love  
Grow gentle without sorrowing,  
Imagining and pondering  
Heaven knows what calamity ;

“ Another's hurried off,” cried he,  
“ From heat and cold and wind and wave ;  
They have heaped the stones above his grave  
In Muirthemne, and over it  
In changeless Ogham letters writ—

*Baile, that was of Rury's seed.*  
But the gods long ago decreed  
No waiting maid should ever spread  
Baile and Aillinn's marriage bed,  
For they should clip and clip again  
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.  
Therefore it is but little news  
That put this hurry in my shoes."

Then seeing that he scarce had spoke  
Before her love-worn heart had broke,  
He ran and laughed until he came  
To that high hill the herdsmen name  
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because  
Some god or king had made the laws  
That held the land together there,  
In old times among the clouds of the air.

That old man climbed ; the day grew dim ;  
Two swans came flying up to him,  
Linked by a gold chain each to each,  
And with low murmuring laughing speech  
Alighted on the windy grass.  
*They knew him : his changed body was*  
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings  
Were hovering over the harp-strings  
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove  
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

What shall I call them ? fish that swim,  
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim  
By a broad water-lily leaf ;  
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf

Forgotten at the threshing place ;  
Or birds lost in the one clear space  
Of morning light in a dim sky ;  
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,  
Or the door pillars of one house,  
Or two sweet blossoming apple-boughs  
That have one shadow on the ground ;  
Or the two strings that made one sound  
Where that wise harper's finger ran.  
For this young girl and this young man  
Have happiness without an end,  
Because they have made so good a friend.

They know all wonders, for they pass  
The towery gates of Gorias,  
And Findrias and Falias,  
And long-forgotten Murias,  
Among the giant kings whose hoard,  
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword,  
Was robbed before earth gave the wheat ;  
Wandering from broken street to street  
They come where some huge watcher is,  
And tremble with their love and kiss.

They know undying things, for they  
Wander where earth withers away,  
Though nothing troubles the great streams  
But light from the pale stars, and gleams  
From the holy orchards, where there is none  
But fruit that is of precious stone,  
Or apples of the sun and moon.

What were our praise to them ? They eat  
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat ;  
Who when night thickens are afloat  
On dappled skins in a glass boat,  
Far out under a windless sky ;  
While over them birds of Aengus fly,  
And over the tiller and the prow,  
And waving white wings to and fro  
Awaken wanderings of light air  
To stir their coverlet and their hair.

And poets found, old writers say,  
A yew tree where his body lay ;  
But a wild apple hid the grass  
With its sweet blossom where hers was ;  
And being in good heart, because  
A better time had come again  
After the deaths of many men,  
And that long fighting at the ford,  
They wrote on tablets of thin board,  
Made of the apple and the yew,  
All the love stories that they knew.

*Let rush and bird cry out their fill  
Of the harper's daughter if they will,  
Beloved, I am not afraid of her.  
She is not wiser nor lovelier,  
And you are more high of heart than she,  
For all her wanderings over-sea ;  
But I'd have bird and rush forget  
Those other two ; for never yet  
Has lover lived, but longed to wive  
Like them that are no more alive.*





FROM  
“IN THE SEVEN WOODS”  
(1904)



## THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

ONE that is ever kind said yesterday :  
“ Your well-belovèd’s hair has threads of grey,  
And little shadows come about her eyes ;  
Time can but make it easier to be wise  
Though now it seem impossible, and so  
All that you need is patience.”

Heart cries “No.

I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain,  
Time can but make her beauty over again :  
Because of that great nobleness of hers  
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs  
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways,  
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.”

O heart ! O heart ! if she’d but turn her head,  
You’d know the folly of being comforted.

## THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS

I CRIED when the moon was murmuring to the birds :  
“ Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,  
I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,  
For the roads are unending, and there is no place to  
my mind.”

The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill,  
And I fell asleep upon lonely Eichtge of streams.  
No boughs have withered because of the wintry  
wind ;  
The boughs have withered because I have told them  
my dreams.

I know of the leafy paths that the witches take,  
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their  
spindles of wool,  
And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake ;  
I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan  
kind  
Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows  
cool  
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam  
gleams.  
No boughs have withered because of the wintry  
wind ;  
The boughs have withered because I have told them  
my dreams.

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round  
Coupled with golden chains, and sing as they fly.  
A king and a queen are wandering there, and the  
sound

Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and  
so blind  
With wisdom, they wander till all the years have  
gone by ;  
I know, and the curlew and peewit on Ectge of  
streams.  
No boughs have withered because of the wintry  
wind ;  
The boughs have withered because I have told them  
my dreams.

## RED HANRAHAN'S SONG ABOUT IRELAND

THE old brown thorn trees break in two high over  
Cummen Strand,  
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left  
hand ;  
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind  
and dies,  
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of  
the eyes  
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over  
Knocknarea,  
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that  
Maeve can say.  
Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts  
abeat ;  
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the  
quiet feet  
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-  
na-Bare,  
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air ;  
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood ;  
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood  
Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES  
IN THE WATER

I HEARD the old, old men say,  
“ Everything alters,  
And one by one we drop away.”  
They had hands like claws, and their knees  
Were twisted like the old thorn trees  
By the waters.  
I heard the old, old men say,  
“ All that’s beautiful drifts away  
Like the waters.”

## THE RAGGED WOOD

O HURRY where by water among the trees  
The delicate stepping stag and his lady sigh,  
When they have but looked upon their images—  
Would none had ever loved but you and I !

Or have you heard that sliding silver-shoed  
Pale silver-proud queen-woman of the sky,  
When the sun looked out of his golden hood ?—  
O that none ever loved but you and I !

O hurry to the ragged wood, for there  
I will drive all those lovers out and cry—  
O my share of the world, O yellow hair !  
No one has ever loved but you and I.



## THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

THERE's many a strong farmer  
Whose heart would break in two,  
If he could see the townland  
That we are riding to ;  
Boughs have their fruit and blossom  
At all times of the year ;  
Rivers are running over  
With red beer and brown beer.  
An old man plays the bagpipes  
In a golden and silver wood ;  
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,  
Are dancing in a crowd.

The little fox he murmured,  
" O what of the world's bane ? "  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein ;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
" O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world's bane."

When their hearts are so high  
That they would come to blows,  
They unhook their heavy swords  
From golden and silver boughs ;  
But all that are killed in battle  
Awaken to life again.  
It is lucky that their story  
Is not known among men,  
For O, the strong farmers

That would let the spade lie,  
Their hearts would be like a cup  
That somebody had drunk dry.

The little fox he murmured,  
" O what of the world's bane ? "  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein ;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
" O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world's bane."

Michael will unhook his trumpet  
From a bough overhead,  
And blow a little noise  
When the supper has been spread.  
Gabriel will come from the water  
With a fish tail, and talk  
Of wonders that have happened  
On wet roads where men walk,  
And lift up an old horn  
Of hammered silver, and drink  
Till he has fallen asleep  
Upon the starry brink.

The little fox he murmured,  
" O what of the world's bane ? "  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein ;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
" O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world's bane."

FROM "THE GREEN HELMET  
AND OTHER POEMS"

(1912)



## THE MASK

"Put off that mask of burning gold  
With emerald eyes."

"O no, my dear, you make so bold  
To find if hearts be wild and wise,  
And yet not cold."

"I would but find what's there to find,  
Love or deceit."

"It was the mask engaged your mind,  
And after set your heart to beat,  
Not what's behind."

"But lest you are my enemy,  
I must enquire."

"O no, my dear, let all that be,  
What matter, so there is but fire  
In you, in me ?"

## THESE ARE THE CLOUDS

THESE are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning eye :  
The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,  
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high  
And discord follow upon unison,  
And all things at one common level lie.  
And therefore, friend, if your great race were run  
And these things came, so much the more thereby  
Have you made greatness your companion,  
Although it be for children that you sigh :  
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

FROM "RESPONSIBILITIES"  
(1914)





*PARDON, old fathers, if you still remain  
Somewhere in ear-shot for the story's end,  
Old Dublin merchant "free of ten and four"  
Or trading out of Galway into Spain ;  
Old country scholar, Robert Emmet's friend,  
A hundred-year-old memory to the poor ;  
Merchant and scholar who have left me blood  
That has not passed through any huckster's loin,  
Soldiers that gave, whatever die was cast :  
A Butler or an Armstrong that withstood  
Beside the brackish waters of the Boyne  
James and his Irish when the Dutchman crossed ;  
Old merchant skipper that leaped overboard  
After a ragged hat in Biscay Bay,  
You most of all, silent and fierce old man,  
Because the daily spectacle that stirred  
My fancy, and set my boyish lips to say  
"Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun" ;  
Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,  
Although I have come close on forty-nine,  
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,  
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.*

*January 1914.*

## THE GREY ROCK

*POETS with whom I learned my trade,  
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,  
Here's an old story I've re-made,  
Imagining 'twould better please  
Your ears than stories now in fashion,  
Though you may think I waste my breath  
Pretending that there can be passion  
That has more life in it than death,  
And though at bottling of your wine  
Old wholesome Goban had no say ;  
The moral's yours because it's mine.*

When cups went round at close of day—  
Is not that how good stories run?—  
The gods were sitting at the board  
In their great house at Slievenamon.  
They sang a drowsy song, or snored,  
For all were full of wine and meat.  
The smoky torches made a glare  
On metal Goban 'd hammered at,  
On old deep silver rolling there  
Or on some still unemptied cup  
That he, when frenzy stirred his thews,  
Had hammered out on mountain top  
To hold the sacred stuff he brews  
That only gods may buy of him.

Now from that juice that made them wise  
All those had lifted up the dim  
Imaginations of their eyes,  
For one that was like woman made

Before their sleepy eyelids ran  
And trembling with her passion said,  
"Come out and dig for a dead man,  
Who's burrowing somewhere in the ground,  
And mock him to his face and then  
Hollo him on with horse and hound,  
For he is the worst of all dead men."

*We should be dazed and terror-struck,  
If we but saw in dreams that room,  
Those wine-drenched eyes, and curse our luck  
That emptied all our days to come.  
I knew a woman none could please,  
Because she dreamed when but a child  
Of men and women made like these ;  
And after, when her blood ran wild,  
Had ravelled her own story out,  
And said, "In two or in three years  
I needs must marry some poor lout,"  
And having said it burst in tears.*

*Since, tavern comrades, you have died,  
Maybe your images have stood,  
Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,  
Before that roomful or as good.  
You had to face your ends when young—  
'Twas wine or women, or some curse—  
But never made a poorer song  
That you might have a heavier purse,  
Nor gave loud service to a cause  
That you might have a troop of friends.  
You kept the Muses' sterner laws,  
And unrepenting faced your ends,*

*And therefore earned the right—and yet  
Dowson and Johnson most I praise—  
To troop with those the world's forgot,  
And copy their proud steady gaze.*

“ The Danish troop was driven out  
Between the dawn and dusk,” she said ;  
“ Although the event was long in doubt,  
Although the King of Ireland's dead  
And half the kings, before sundown  
All was accomplished.

“ When this day  
Murrrough, the King of Ireland's son,  
Foot after foot was giving way,  
He and his best troops back to back  
Had perished there, but the Danes ran,  
Stricken with panic from the attack,  
The shouting of an unseen man ;  
And being thankful Murrrough found,  
Led by a footsole dipped in blood  
That had made prints upon the ground,  
Where by old thorn trees that man stood ;  
And though when he gazed here and there,  
He had but gazed on thorn trees, spoke,  
‘ Who is the friend that seems but air  
And yet could give so fine a stroke ? ’  
Thereon a young man met his eye,  
Who said, ‘ Because she held me in  
Her love, and would not have me die,  
Rock-nurtured Aoife took a pin,  
And pushing it into my shirt,  
Promised that for a pin's sake  
No man should see to do me hurt ;

But there it's gone ; I will not take  
The fortune that had been my shame  
Seeing, King's son, what wounds you have.'  
'Twas roundly spoke, but when night came  
He had betrayed me to his grave,  
For he and the King's son were dead.  
I'd promised him two hundred years,  
And when for all I'd done or said—  
And these immortal eyes shed tears—  
He claimed his country's need was most,  
I'd saved his life, yet for the sake  
Of a new friend he has turned a ghost.  
What does he care if my heart break ?  
I call for spade and horse and hound  
That we may harry him." Thereon  
She cast herself upon the ground  
And rent her clothes and made her moan :  
" Why are they faithless when their might  
Is from the holy shades that rove  
The grey rock and the windy light ?  
Why should the faithfulest heart most love  
The bitter sweetness of false faces ?  
Why must the lasting love what passes,  
Why are the gods by men betrayed ! "

But thereon every god stood up  
With a slow smile and without sound,  
And stretching forth his arm and cup  
To where she moaned upon the ground,  
Suddenly drenched her to the skin ;  
And she with Goban's wine adrip,  
No more remembering what had been,  
Stared at the gods with laughing lip.

*I have kept my faith, though faith was tried,  
To that rock-born, rock-wandering foot,  
And the world's altered since you died,  
And I am in no good repute  
With the loud host before the sea,  
That think sword strokes were better meant  
Than lover's music—let that be,  
So that the wandering foot's content.*

SEPTEMBER 1913

WHAT need you, being come to sense,  
But fumble in a greasy till  
And add the halfpence to the pence  
And prayer to shivering prayer, until  
You have dried the marrow from the bone ?  
For men were born to pray and save :  
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind,  
The names that stilled your childish play,  
They have gone about the world like wind,  
But little time had they to pray  
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,  
And what, God help us, could they save ?  
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Was it for this the wild geese spread  
The grey wing upon every tide ;  
For this that all that blood was shed,  
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,  
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,  
All that delirium of the brave ?  
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again,  
And call those exiles as they were  
In all their loneliness and pain,  
You'd cry " Some woman's yellow hair

Has maddened every mother's son " :  
They weighed so lightly what they gave,  
But let them be, they're dead and gone,  
They're with O'Leary in the grave.



TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK HAS COME  
TO NOTHING

Now all the truth is out,  
Be secret and take defeat  
From any brazen throat,  
For how can you compete,  
Being honour bred, with one  
Who, were it proved he lies,  
Were neither shamed in his own  
Nor in his neighbours' eyes?  
Bred to a harder thing  
Than Triumph, turn away  
And like a laughing string  
Whereon mad fingers play  
Amid a place of stone,  
Be secret and exult,  
Because of all things known  
That is most difficult.

## TO A SHADE

If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,  
Whether to look upon your monument  
(I wonder if the builder has been paid)  
Or happier-thoughted when the day is spent  
To drink of that salt breath out of the sea  
When grey gulls flit about instead of men,  
And the gaunt houses put on majesty :  
Let these content you and be gone again ;  
For they are at their old tricks yet.

A man  
Of your own passionate serving kind who had  
brought  
In his full hands what, had they only known,  
Had given their children's children loftier thought,  
Sweeter emotion, working in their veins  
Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,  
And insult heaped upon him for his pains  
And for his open-handedness, disgrace ;  
Your enemy, an old foul mouth, had set  
The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,  
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet  
About your head till the dust stops your ear,  
The time for you to taste of that salt breath  
And listen at the corners has not come ;  
You had enough of sorrow before death—  
Away, away ! You are safer in the tomb.

*September 29, 1913.*

## WHEN HELEN LIVED

WE have cried in our despair  
That men desert,  
For some trivial affair  
Or noisy, insolent, sport,  
Beauty that we have won  
From bitterest hours ;  
Yet we, had we walked within  
Those topless towers  
Where Helen walked with her boy,  
Had given but as the rest  
Of the men and women of Troy,  
A word and a jest.

## RUNNING TO PARADISE

As I came over Windy Gap  
They threw a halfpenny into my cap,  
For I am running to Paradise ;  
And all that I need do is to wish  
And somebody puts his hand in the dish  
To throw me a bit of salted fish :  
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

My brother Mourteen is worn out  
With skelping his big brawling lout,  
And I am running to Paradise ;  
A poor life, do what he can,  
And though he keep a dog and a gun,  
A serving maid and a serving man :  
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

Poor men have grown to be rich men,  
And rich men grown to be poor again,  
And I am running to Paradise ;  
And many a darling wit's grown dull  
That tossed a bare heel when at school,  
Now it has filled an old sock full :  
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

The wind is old and still at play  
While I must hurry upon my way,  
For I am running to Paradise ;  
Yet never have I lit on a friend  
To take my fancy like the wind  
That nobody can buy or bind :  
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

## THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

A CURSING rogue with a merry face,  
A bundle of rags upon a crutch,  
Stumbled upon that windy place  
Called Croghan, and it was as much  
As the one sturdy leg could do  
To keep him upright while he cursed.  
He had counted, where long years ago  
Queen Maeve's nine Maines had been nursed,  
A pair of lapwings, one old sheep  
And not a house to the plain's edge,  
When close to his right hand a heap  
Of grey stones and a rocky ledge  
Reminded him that he could make,  
If he but shifted a few stones,  
A shelter till the daylight broke.

But while he fumbled with the stones  
They toppled over ; " Were it not  
I have a lucky wooden shin  
I had been hurt " ; and toppling brought  
Before his eyes, where stones had been,  
A dark deep hollow in the rock.  
He gave a gasp and thought to have fled,  
Being certain it was no right rock  
Because an ancient history said  
Hell Mouth lay open near that place,  
And yet stood still, because inside  
A great lad with a beery face  
Had tucked himself away beside  
A ladle and a tub of beer,  
And snored, no phantom by his look.

So with a laugh at his own fear  
He crawled into that pleasant nook.

"Night grows uneasy near the dawn  
Till even I sleep light ; but who  
Has tired of his own company ?  
What one of Maeve's nine brawling sons  
Sick of his grave has wakened me ?  
But let him keep his grave for once  
That I may find the sleep I have lost."

"What care I if you sleep or wake ?  
But I'll have no man call me ghost."

"Say what you please, but from daybreak  
I'll sleep another century."

"And I will talk before I sleep  
And drink before I talk."

And he  
Had dipped the wooden ladle deep  
Into the sleeper's tub of beer  
Had not the sleeper started up.

"Before you have dipped it in the beer  
I dragged from Goban's mountain-top  
I'll have assurance that you are able  
To value beer ; no half-legged fool  
Shall dip his nose into my ladle  
Merely for stumbling on this hole  
In the bad hour before the dawn."

"Why, beer is only beer."

“ But say  
‘ I’ll sleep until the winter’s gone,  
Or maybe to Midsummer Day,’  
And drink, and you will sleep that length.”

“ I’d like to sleep till winter’s gone  
Or till the sun is in his strength.  
This blast has chilled me to the bone.”

“ I had no better plan at first.  
I thought to wait for that or this ;  
Maybe the weather was a-cursed  
Or I had no woman there to kiss ;  
So slept for half a year or so ;  
But year by year I found that less  
Gave me such pleasure I’d forgo  
Even a half hour’s nothingness,  
And when at one year’s end I found  
I had not waked a single minute,  
I chose this burrow under ground.  
I’ll sleep away all Time within it :  
My sleep were now nine centuries  
But for those mornings when I find  
The lapwing at their foolish cries  
And the sheep bleating at the wind  
As when I also played the fool.”

The beggar in a rage began  
Upon his hunkers in the hole,  
“ It’s plain that you are no right man  
To mock at everything I love  
As if it were not worth the doing.  
I’d have a merry life enough

If a good Easter wind were blowing,  
And though the winter wind is bad  
I should not be too down in the mouth  
For anything you did or said  
If but this wind were in the south."

" You cry aloud, O would 'twere spring  
Or that the wind would shift a point,  
And do not know that you would bring,  
If time were suppler in the joint,  
Neither the spring nor the south wind  
But the hour when you shall pass away  
And leave no smoking wick behind,  
For all life longs for the Last Day  
And there's no man but cocks his ear  
To know when Michael's trumpet cries  
That flesh and bone may disappear,  
And souls as if they were but sighs,  
And there be nothing but God left ;  
But I alone being blessed keep  
Like some old rabbit to my cleft  
And wait Him in a drunken sleep."  
He dipped his ladle in the tub  
And drank and yawned and stretched him out.  
The other shouted, " You would rob  
My life of every pleasant thought  
And every comfortable thing  
And so take that and that." Thereon  
He gave him a great pummelling,  
But might have pummelled at a stone  
For all the sleeper knew or cared ;  
And after heaped up stone on stone,  
And then, grown weary, prayed and cursed



And heaped up stone on stone again,  
And prayed and cursed and cursed and fled  
From Maeve and all that juggling plain,  
Nor gave God thanks till overhead  
The clouds were brightening with the dawn.

## THE MOUNTAIN TOMB

POUR wine and dance if Manhood still have pride,  
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom ;  
The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet  
That there be no foot silent in the room  
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet ;  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain ; the cataract still cries,  
The everlasting taper lights the gloom ;  
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes  
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

## I

## TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND

DANCE there upon the shore ;  
What need have you to care  
For wind or water's roar ?  
And tumble out your hair  
That the salt drops have wet ;  
Being young you have not known  
The fool's triumph, nor yet  
Love lost as soon as won,  
Nor the best labourer dead  
And all the sheaves to bind.  
What need have you to dread  
The monstrous crying of wind ?

## II

### TWO YEARS LATER

HAS no one said those daring  
Kind eyes should be more learn'd ?  
Or warned you how despairing  
The moths are when they are burned ?  
I could have warned you ; but you are young,  
So we speak a different tongue.

O you will take whatever's offered  
And dream that all the world's a friend,  
Suffer as your mother suffered,  
Be as broken in the end ;  
But I am old and you are young,  
And I speak a barbarous tongue.

## FRIENDS

Now must I these three praise—  
Three women that have wrought  
What joy is in my days ;  
One that no passing thought,  
Nor those unpassing cares,  
No, not in these fifteen  
Many times troubled years,  
Could ever come between  
Mind and delighted mind ;  
And one because her hand  
Had strength that could unbind  
What none can understand,  
What none can have and thrive,  
Youth's dreamy load, till she  
So changed me that I live  
Labouring in ecstasy.  
And what of her that took  
All till my youth was gone  
With scarce a pitying look ?  
How should I praise that one ?  
When day begins to break  
I count my good and bad,  
Being wakeful for her sake,  
Remembering what she had,  
What eagle look still shows,  
While up from my heart's root  
So great a sweetness flows  
I shake from head to foot.

## THE COLD HEAVEN

SUDDENLY I saw the cold and rook-delighting Heaven  
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the  
more ice,

And thereupon imagination and heart were driven  
So wild that every casual thought of that and this  
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out  
of season

With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long  
ago ;

And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,  
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,  
Riddled with light. Ah ! when the ghost begins to  
quicken,

Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent  
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and  
stricken

By the injustice of the skies for punishment ?

### THAT THE NIGHT COME

SHE lived in storm and strife,  
Her soul had such desire  
For what proud death may bring  
That it could not endure  
That common good of life,  
But lived as 'twere a king  
That packed his marriage day  
With banneret and pennon,  
Trumpet and kettledrum,  
And the outrageous cannon,  
To bundle time away  
That the night come.

## THE MAGI

Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,  
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones  
Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky  
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,  
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,  
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,  
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,  
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.



FROM  
"THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE"  
(1919)



## THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

THE trees are in their autumn beauty,  
The woodland paths are dry,  
Under the October twilight the water  
Mirrors a still sky ;  
Upon the brimming water among the stones  
Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth Autumn has come upon me  
Since I first made my count ;  
I saw, before I had well finished,  
All suddenly mount  
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings  
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,  
And now my heart is sore.  
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,  
The first time on this shore,  
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,  
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
They paddle in the cold,  
Companionable streams or climb the air ;  
Their hearts have not grown old ;  
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,  
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,  
Mysterious, beautiful ;

Among what rushes will they build,  
By what lake's edge or pool  
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
To find they have flown away ?

IN MEMORY OF MAJOR ROBERT GREGORY

I

Now that we're almost settled in our house  
I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us  
Beside a fire of turf in th' ancient tower,  
And having talked to some late hour  
Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed :  
Discoverers of forgotten truth  
Or mere companions of my youth,  
All, all are in my thoughts to-night being dead.

2

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old  
And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,  
And there is salt to lengthen out the smart  
In the affections of our heart,  
And quarrels are blown up upon that head ;  
But not a friend that I would bring  
This night can set us quarrelling,  
For all that come into my mind are dead.

3

Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,  
That loved his learning better than mankind,  
Though courteous to the worst ; much falling he  
Brooded upon sanctity  
Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed  
A long blast upon the horn that brought  
A little nearer to his thought  
A measureless consummation that he dreamed.

## 4

And that enquiring man John Synge comes next,  
 That dying chose the living world for text  
 And never could have rested in the tomb  
 But that, long travelling, he had come  
 Towards nightfall upon certain set apart  
 In a most desolate stony place,  
 Towards nightfall upon a race  
 Passionate and simple like his heart.

## 5

And then I think of old George Pollexfen,  
 In muscular youth well known to Mayo men  
 For horsemanship at meets or at race-courses,  
 That could have shown how purebred horses  
 And solid men, for all their passion, live  
 But as the outrageous stars incline  
 By opposition, square and trine ;  
 Having grown sluggish and contemplative.

## 6

They were my close companions many a year,  
 A portion of my mind and life, as it were,  
 And now their breathless faces seem to look  
 Out of some old picture-book ;  
 I am accustomed to their lack of breath,  
 But not that my dear friend's dear son,  
 Our Sidney and our perfect man,  
 Could share in that discourtesy of death.

## 7

For all things the delighted eye now sees  
 Were loved by him ; the old storm-broken trees  
 That cast their shadows upon road and bridge ;  
 The tower set on the stream's edge ;  
 The ford where drinking cattle make a stir  
 Nightly, and startled by that sound  
 The water-hen must change her ground ;  
 He might have been your heartiest welcomer.

## 8

When with the Galway foxhounds he would ride  
 From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side  
 Or Esserkelly plain, few kept his pace ;  
 At Mooneen he had leaped a place  
 So perilous that half the astonished meet  
 Had shut their eyes, and where was it  
 He rode a race without a bit ?  
 And yet his mind outran the horses' feet.

## 9

We dreamed that a great painter had been born  
 To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,  
 To that stern colour and that delicate line  
 That are our secret discipline  
 Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might.  
 Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
 And yet he had the intensity  
 To have published all to be a world's delight.

## 10

What other could so well have counselled us  
 In all lovely intricacies of a house  
 As he that practised or that understood  
 All work in metal or in wood,  
 In moulded plaster or in carven stone ?  
 Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
 And all he did done perfectly  
 As though he had but that one trade alone.

## 11

Some burn damp faggots, others may consume  
 The entire combustible world in one small room  
 As though dried straw, and if we turn about  
 The bare chimney is gone black out  
 Because the work had finished in that flare.  
 Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
 As 'twere all life's epitome.  
 What made us dream that he could comb grey hair ?

## 12

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind  
 That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind  
 All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved,  
 Or boyish intellect approved,  
 With some appropriate commentary on each ;  
 Until imagination brought  
 A fitter welcome ; but a thought  
 Of that late death took all my heart for speech.



## AN IRISH AIRMAN FORESEES HIS DEATH

I KNOW that I shall meet my fate  
Somewhere among the clouds above ;  
Those that I fight I do not hate,  
Those that I guard I do not love ;  
My country is Kiltartan Cross,  
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,  
No likely end could bring them loss  
Or leave them happier than before.  
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,  
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,  
A lonely impulse of delight  
Drove to this tumult in the clouds ;  
I balanced all, brought all to mind,  
The years to come seemed waste of breath,  
A waste of breath the years behind  
In balance with this life, this death.

## LINES WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

WHEN have I last looked on  
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies  
Of the dark leopards of the moon ?  
All the wild witches, those most noble ladies,  
For all their broom-sticks and their tears,  
Their angry tears, are gone.  
The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished ;  
I have nothing but the embittered sun ;  
Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,  
And now that I have come to fifty years  
I must endure the timid sun.

## THE DAWN

I WOULD be ignorant as the dawn  
That has looked down  
On that old queen measuring a town  
With the pin of a brooch,  
Or on the withered men that saw  
From their pedantic Babylon  
The careless planets in their courses,  
The stars fade out where the moon comes,  
And took their tablets and did sums ;  
I would be ignorant as the dawn  
That merely stood, rocking the glittering coach  
Above the cloudy shoulders of the horses ;  
I would be—for no knowledge is worth a straw—  
Ignorant and wanton as the dawn.

## ON WOMAN

MAY God be praised for woman  
That gives up all her mind,  
A man may find in no man  
A friendship of her kind  
That covers all he has brought  
As with her flesh and bone,  
Nor quarrels with a thought  
Because it is not her own.

Though pedantry denies,  
It's plain the Bible means  
That Solomon grew wise  
While talking with his queens  
Yet never could, although  
They say he counted grass,  
Count all the praises due  
When Sheba was his lass,  
When she the iron wrought, or  
When from the smithy fire  
It shuddered in the water :  
Harshness of their desire  
That made them stretch and yawn,  
Pleasure that comes with sleep,  
Shudder that made them one.  
What else He give or keep  
God grant me—no, not here,  
For I am not so bold  
To hope a thing so dear  
Now I am growing old,  
But when if the tale's true  
The Pestle of the moon

That pounds up all anew  
Brings me to birth again—  
To find what once I had  
And know what once I have known,  
Until I am driven mad,  
Sleep driven from my bed,  
By tenderness and care,  
Pity, an aching head,  
Gnashing of teeth, despair ;  
And all because of some one  
Perverse creature of chance,  
And live like Solomon  
That Sheba led a dance.

## THE FISHERMAN

ALTHOUGH I can see him still,  
The freckled man who goes  
To a grey place on a hill  
In grey Connemara clothes  
At dawn to cast his flies,  
It's long since I began  
To call up to the eyes  
This wise and simple man.  
All day I'd looked in the face  
What I had hoped 'twould be  
To write for my own race  
And the reality ;  
The living men that I hate,  
The dead man that I loved,  
The craven man in his seat,  
The insolent unreprieved,  
And no knave brought to book  
Who has won a drunken cheer,  
The witty man and his joke  
Aimed at the commonest ear,  
The clever man who cries  
The catch-cries of the clown,  
The beating down of the wise  
And great Art beaten down.  
Maybe a twelvemonth since  
Suddenly I began,  
In scorn of this audience  
Imagining a man,  
And his sun-freckled face,  
And grey Connemara cloth,  
Climbing up to a place

Where stone is dark under froth,  
And the down turn of his wrist  
When the flies drop in the stream ;  
A man who does not exist,  
A man who is but a dream ;  
And cried, " Before I am old  
I shall have written him one  
Poem maybe as cold  
And passionate as the dawn."

## MEMORY

ONE had a lovely face,  
And two or three had charm,  
But charm and face were in vain  
Because the mountain grass  
Cannot but keep the form  
Where the mountain hare has lain.



## HIS PHOENIX

THERE is a queen in China, or maybe it's in Spain,  
And birthdays and holidays such praises can be heard  
Of her unblemished lineaments, a whiteness with no  
    stain,  
That she might be that sprightly girl trodden by a  
    bird ;  
And there's a score of duchesses, surpassing woman-  
    kind,  
Or who have found a painter to make them so for  
    pay  
And smooth out stain and blemish with the elegance  
    of his mind :  
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their  
    day.

The young men every night applaud their Gaby's  
    laughing eye,  
And Ruth St. Denis had more charm although she  
    had poor luck,  
From nineteen hundred nine or ten, Pavlova's had  
    the cry,  
And there's a player in the States who gathers up her  
    cloak  
And flings herself out of the room when Juliet would  
    be bride  
With all a woman's passion, a child's imperious  
    way,  
And there are—but no matter if there are scores  
    beside :  
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their  
    day.

There's Margaret and Marjorie and Dorothy and  
Nan,  
A Daphne and a Mary who live in privacy ;  
One's had her fill of lovers, another's had but one,  
Another boasts, " I pick and choose and have but  
two or three."  
If head and limb have beauty and the instep's high  
and light  
They can spread out what sail they please for all I  
have to say,  
Be but the breakers of men's hearts or engines of  
delight :  
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their  
day.

There'll be that crowd, that barbarous crowd, through  
all the centuries,  
And who can say but some young belle may walk and  
talk men wild  
Who is my beauty's equal, though that my heart  
denies,  
But not the exact likeness, the simplicity of a child,  
And that proud look as though she had gazed into  
the burning sun,  
And all the shapely body no tittle gone astray.  
I mourn for that most lonely thing ; and yet God's  
will be done,  
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their  
day.

## UPON A DYING LADY

### I

#### HER COURTESY

With the old kindness, the old distinguished grace,  
She lies, her lovely piteous head amid dull red hair  
Propped upon pillows, rouge on the pallor of her  
face.

She would not have us sad because she is lying there,  
And when she meets our gaze her eyes are laughter-  
lit,

Her speech a wicked tale that we may vie with her,  
Matching our broken-hearted wit against her wit,  
Thinking of saints and of Petronius Arbiter.

### II

#### CERTAIN ARTISTS BRING HER DOLLS AND DRAWINGS

Bring where our Beauty lies  
A new modelled doll, or drawing,  
With a friend's or an enemy's  
Features, or maybe showing  
Her features when a tress  
Of dull red hair was flowing  
Over some silken dress  
Cut in the Turkish fashion,  
Or, it may be, like a boy's.  
We have given the world our passion,  
We have naught for death but toys.

### III

#### SHE TURNS THE DOLLS' FACES TO THE WALL

Because to-day is some religious festival  
They had a priest say Mass, and even the Japanese,  
Heel up and weight on toe, must face the wall  
—Pedant in passion, learned in old courtesies,  
Vehement and witty she had seemed— ; the Venetian lady  
Who had seemed to glide to some intrigue in her red shoes,  
Her domino, her panniered skirt copied from Longhi ;  
The meditative critic ; all ate on their toes,  
Even our Beauty with her Turkish trousers on.  
Because the priest must have like every dog his day  
Or keep us all awake with baying at the moon,  
We and our dolls being but the world were best away.

### IV

#### THE END OF DAY

She is playing like a child  
And penance is the play,  
Fantastical and wild  
Because the end of day  
Shows her that some one soon  
Will come from the house, and say—  
Though play is but half-done—  
“ Come in and leave the play.”—

## V

## HER RACE

She has not grown uncivil  
 As narrow natures would  
 And called the pleasures evil  
 Happier days thought good ;  
 She knows herself a woman,  
 No red and white of a face,  
 Or rank, raised from a common  
 Unreckonable race ;  
 And how should her heart fail her  
 Or sickness break her will  
 With her dead brother's valour  
 For an example still ?

## VI

## HER COURAGE

When her soul flies to the predestined dancing-place  
 (I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I  
     made  
 Amid the dreams of youth) let her come face to face,  
 Amid that first astonishment, with Grania's shade,  
 All but the terrors of the woodland flight forgot  
 That made her Dermuid dear, and some old cardinal  
 Pacing with half-closed eyelids in a sunny spot  
 Who had murmured of Giorgione at his latest  
     breath—  
 Aye and Achilles, Timor, Babar, Barhaim, all  
 Who have lived in joy and laughed into the face of  
     Death.

VII

HER FRIENDS BRING HER A CHRISTMAS TREE

Pardon, great enemy,  
Without an angry thought  
We've carried in our tree,  
And here and there have bought  
Till all the boughs are gay,  
And she may look from the bed  
On pretty things that may  
Please a fantastic head.  
Give her a little grace,  
What if a laughing eye  
Have looked into your face—  
It is about to die.

## TWO SONGS OF A FOOL

### I

A SPECKLED cat and a tame hare  
Eat at my hearthstone  
And sleep there ;  
And both look up to me alone  
For learning and defence  
As I look up to Providence.

I start out of my sleep to think  
Some day I may forget  
Their food and drink ;  
Or, the house door left unshut,  
The hare may run till it's found  
The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

I bear a burden that might well try  
Men that do all by rule,  
And what can I  
That am a wandering-witted fool  
But pray to God that He ease  
My great responsibilities ?

### II

I slept on my three-legged stool by the fire,  
The speckled cat slept on my knee ;  
We never thought to enquire  
Where the brown hare might be,  
And whether the door were shut.

Who knows how she drank the wind  
Stretched up on two legs from the mat,  
Before she had settled her mind  
To drum with her heel and to leap ?  
Had I but awakened from sleep  
And called her name, she had heard,  
It may be, and had not stirred,  
That now, it may be, has found  
The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.



## THE SCHOLARS

BALD heads forgetful of their sins,  
Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
Edit and annotate the lines  
That young men, tossing on their beds,  
Rhymed out in love's despair  
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

All shuffle there ; all cough in ink ;  
All wear the carpet with their shoes ;  
All think what other people think ;  
All know the man their neighbour knows.  
Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way ?

## TO A YOUNG GIRL

My dear, my dear, I know  
More than another  
What makes your heart beat so ;  
Not even your own mother  
Can know it as I know,  
Who broke my heart for her  
When the wild thought,  
That she denies  
And has forgot,  
Set all her blood astir  
And glittered in her eyes.

FROM  
“FOUR PLAYS FOR DANCERS”  
(1921)



A WOMAN'S BEAUTY IS LIKE A WHITE  
FRAIL BIRD

A WOMAN's beauty is like a white  
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone  
At daybreak after stormy night  
Between two furrows upon the ploughed land :  
A sudden storm, and it was thrown  
Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land.  
How many centuries spent  
The sedentary soul  
In toils of measurement  
Beyond eagle or mole,  
Beyond hearing or seeing,  
Or Archimedes' guess,  
To raise into being  
That loveliness ?

A strange unserviceable thing,  
A fragile, exquisite, pale shell,  
That the vast troubled waters bring  
To the loud sands before day has broken.  
The storm arose and suddenly fell  
Amid the dark before day had broken.  
What death ? what discipline ?  
What bonds no man could unbind,  
Being imagined within  
The labyrinth of the mind,  
What pursuing or fleeing,  
What wounds, what bloody press,  
Dragged into being  
This loveliness ?

## WHY DOES YOUR HEART BEAT THUS?

WHY does your heart beat thus ?  
Plain to be understood  
I have met in a man's house  
A statue of solitude,  
Moving there and walking ;  
Its strange heart beating fast  
For all our talking.  
O still that heart at last.

O bitter reward  
Of many a tragic tomb !  
And we though astonished are dumb  
And give but a sigh and a word,  
A passing word.

Although the door be shut  
And all seem well enough,  
Although wide world hold not  
A man but will give you his love  
The moment he has looked at you,  
He that has loved the best  
May turn from a statue  
His too human breast.

O bitter reward  
Of many a tragic tomb !  
And we though astonished are dumb  
Or give but a sigh and a word,  
A passing word.

What makes your heart so beat ?  
What man is at your side ?  
When beauty is complete  
Your own thought will have died  
And danger not be diminished ;  
Dimmed at three-quarter light,  
When moon's round is finished  
The stars are out of sight.

O bitter reward  
Of many a tragic tomb !  
And we though astonished are dumb  
Or give but a sigh and a word,  
A passing word.

## WHY DOES MY HEART BEAT SO ?

WHY does my heart beat so ?  
Did not a shadow pass ?  
It passed by a moment ago.  
Who can have trod in the grass ?  
What rogue is night-wandering ?  
Have not old writers said  
That dizzy dreams can spring  
From the dry bones of the dead ?  
And many a night it seems  
That all the valley fills  
With those fantastic dreams.  
They overflow the hills,  
So passionate is a shade,  
Like wine that fills to the top  
A grey-green cup of jade,  
Or maybe an agate cup.



## WHY SHOULD THE HEART TAKE FRIGHT?

WHY should the heart take fright?  
What sets it beating so?  
The bitter sweetness of the night  
Has made it but a lonely thing.  
Red bird of March, begin to crow,  
Up with the neck and clap the wing,  
Red cock, and crow.

My heart is in a cloud;  
I'd let the whole world go;  
My rascal heart is proud  
Remembering and remembering.  
Red bird of March, begin to crow,  
Up with the neck and clap the wing,  
Red cock, and crow.

The dreaming bones cry out  
Because the night winds blow  
And heaven's a cloudy blot.  
Calamity can have its fling.  
Red bird of March, begin to crow,  
Up with the neck and clap the wing,  
Red cock, and crow.

## AT THE GREY ROUND OF THE HILL

### I

At the grey round of the hill  
Music of a lost kingdom  
Runs, runs and is suddenly still,  
The winds out of Clare-Galway  
Carry it : suddenly it is still.

I have heard in the night air  
A wandering airy music ;  
And moldered in that snare  
A man is lost of a sudden,  
In that sweet wandering snare.

What finger first began  
Music of a lost kingdom ?  
They dream that laughed in the sun.  
Dry bones that dream are bitter,  
They dream and darken our sun.

Those crazy fingers play  
A wandering airy music ;  
Our luck is withered away,  
And wheat in the wheat-ear withered,  
And the wind blows it away.

### II

My heart ran wild when it heard  
The curlew cry before dawn

And the eddying cat-headed bird ;  
But now the night is gone.  
I have heard from far below  
The strong March birds a-crow,  
Stretch neck and clap the wing,  
Red cocks, and crow.



FROM "MICHAEL ROBARTES AND  
THE DANCER"

(1921)



EASTER, 1916

I HAVE met them at close of day  
Coming with vivid faces  
From counter or desk among grey  
Eighteenth-century houses.  
I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn :  
All changed, changed utterly :  
A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent  
In ignorant good-will,  
Her nights in argument  
Until her voice grew shrill.  
What voice more sweet than hers  
When young and beautiful,  
She rode to harriers ?  
This man had kept a school  
And rode our wingèd horse ;  
This other his helper and friend  
Was coming into his force ;  
He might have won fame in the end,  
So sensitive his nature seemed,  
So daring and sweet his thought.

This other man I had dreamed  
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.  
He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,  
Yet I number him in the song ;  
He, too, has resigned his part  
In the casual comedy ;  
He, too, has been changed in his turn,  
Transformed utterly :  
A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone  
Through summer and winter seem  
Enchanted to a stone  
To trouble the living stream.  
The horse that comes from the road,  
The rider, the birds that range  
From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
Minute by minute they change ;  
A shadow of cloud on the stream  
Changes minute by minute ;  
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,  
And a horse plashes within it ;  
The long-legged moor-hens dive,  
And hens to moor-cocks call ;  
Minute by minute they live :  
The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a stone of the heart.  
O when may it suffice ?  
That is Heaven's part, our part  
To murmur name upon name,



As a mother names her child  
When sleep at last has come  
On limbs that had run wild.  
What is it but nightfall ?  
No, no, not night but death ;  
Was it needless death after all ?  
For England may keep faith  
For all that is done and said.  
We know their dream ; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead ;  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died ?  
I write it out in a verse—  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly :  
A terrible beauty is born.

*September 25, 1916.*

## SIXTEEN DEAD MEN

O BUT we talked at large before  
The sixteen men were shot,  
But who can talk of give and take,  
What should be and what not  
While those dead men are loitering there  
To stir the boiling pot ?

You say that we should still the land  
Till Germany's overcome ;  
But who is there to argue that  
Now Pearse is deaf and dumb ?  
And is their logic to outweigh  
MacDonagh's bony thumb ?

How could you dream they'd listen  
That have an ear alone  
For those new comrades they have found,  
Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone,  
Or meddle with our give and take  
That converse bone to bone ?

## THE ROSE TREE

" O words are lightly spoken,"  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
" Maybe a breath of politic words  
Has withered our Rose Tree ;  
Or maybe but a wind that blows  
Across the bitter sea."

" It needs to be but watered,"  
James Connolly replied,  
" To make the green come out again  
And spread on every side,  
And shake the blossom from the bud  
To be the garden's pride."

" But where can we draw water,"  
Said Pearse to Connolly,  
" When all the wells are parched away ?  
O plain as plain can be  
There's nothing but our own red blood  
Can make a right Rose Tree."

## ON A POLITICAL PRISONER

SHE that but little patience knew,  
From childhood on, had now so much  
A grey gull lost its fear and flew  
Down to her cell and there alit,  
And there endured her fingers' touch  
And from her fingers ate its bit.

Did she in touching that lone wing  
Recall the years before her mind  
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,  
Her thought some popular enmity :  
Blind and leader of the blind  
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie ?

When long ago I saw her ride  
Under Ben Bulbin to the meet,  
The beauty of her country-side  
With all youth's lonely wildness stirred,  
She seemed to have grown clean and sweet  
Like any rock-bred, sea-borne bird :

Sea-borne, or balanced on the air  
When first it sprang out of the nest  
Upon some lofty rock to stare  
Upon the cloudy canopy,  
While under its storm-beaten breast  
Cried out the hollows of the sea.

## DEMON AND BEAST

For certain minutes at the least  
That crafty demon and that loud beast  
That plague me day and night  
Ran out of my sight ;  
Though I had long perned in the gyre,  
Between my hatred and desire,  
I saw my freedom won  
And all laugh in the sun.

The glittering eyes in a death's head  
Of old Luke Wadding's portrait said  
Welcome, and the Ormondes all  
Nodded upon the wall,  
And even Strafford smiled as though  
It made him happier to know  
I understood his plan.  
Now that the loud beast ran  
There was no portrait in the Gallery  
But beckoned to sweet company,  
For all men's thoughts grew clear  
Being dear as mine are dear.

But soon a tear-drop started up,  
For aimless joy had made me stop  
Beside the little lake  
To watch a white gull take  
A bit of bread thrown up into the air ;  
Now gyring down and perning there  
He splashed where an absurd  
Portly green-pated bird

Shook off the water from his back ;  
Being no more demoniac  
A stupid happy creature  
Could rouse my whole nature.

Yet I am certain as can be  
That every natural victory  
Belongs to beast or demon,  
That never yet had freeman  
Right mastery of natural things,  
And that mere growing old, that brings  
Chilled blood, this sweetness brought ;  
Yet have no dearer thought  
Than that I may find out a way  
To make it linger half a day.

O what a sweetness strayed  
Through barren Thebaid,  
Or by the Mareotic sea  
When that exultant Anthony  
And twice a thousand more  
Starved upon the shore  
And withered to a bag of bones !  
What had the Caesars but their thrones ?

## A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

ONCE more the storm is howling, and half hid  
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill  
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,  
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed ;  
And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child an  
hour  
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,  
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream  
In the elms above the flooded stream ;  
Imagining in excited reverie  
That the future years had come,  
Dancing to a frenzied drum,  
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not  
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,  
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,  
Being made beautiful overmuch,  
Consider beauty a sufficient end,  
Lose natural kindness and maybe  
The heart-revealing intimacy  
That chooses right, and never find a friend.

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull  
And later had much trouble from a fool,

While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,  
Being fatherless could have her way  
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.  
It's certain that fine women eat  
A crazy salad with their meat  
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned ;  
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned  
By those that are not entirely beautiful ;  
Yet many, that have played the fool  
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,  
And many a poor man that has roved,  
Loved and thought himself beloved,  
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

May she become a flourishing hidden tree  
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,  
And have no business but dispensing round  
Their magnanimities of sound,  
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,  
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.  
Oh, may she live like some green laurel  
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,  
The sort of beauty that I have approved,  
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,  
Yet knows that to be choked with hate  
May well be of all evil chances chief.  
If there's no hatred in a mind  
Assault and battery of the wind  
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.



An intellectual hatred is the worst,  
So let her think opinions are accursed.  
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born  
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,  
Because of her opinionated mind  
Barter that horn and every good  
By quiet natures understood  
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
The soul recovers radical innocence  
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,  
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will ;  
She can, though every face should scowl  
And every windy quarter howl  
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bride-groom bring her to a house  
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious ;  
For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
Peddled in the thoroughfares.  
How but in custom and in ceremony  
Are innocence and beauty born ?  
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

*June 1919.*



FROM "THE TOWER"  
(1928)



## SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

### I

THAT is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
—Those dying generations—at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.

### II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence ;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.

### III

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
And be the singing masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away ; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is ; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy emperor awake ;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

1927.

## MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR

### I

#### ANCESTRAL HOUSES

SURELY among a rich man's flowering lawns,  
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,  
Life overflows without ambitious pains ;  
And rains down life until the basin spills,  
And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains  
As though to choose whatever shape it wills  
And never stoop to a mechanical,  
Or servile shape, at others' beck and call.

Mere dreams, mere dreams ! Yet Homer had not  
sung

Had he not found it certain beyond dreams  
That out of life's own self-delight had sprung  
The abounding glittering jet ; though now it seems  
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung  
Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,  
And not a fountain, were the symbol which  
Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.

Some violent bitter man, some powerful man  
Called architect and artist in, that they,  
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone  
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,  
The gentleness none there had ever known ;  
But when the master's buried mice can play,  
And maybe the great-grandson of that house,  
For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse.

Oh, what if gardens where the peacock strays  
With delicate feet upon old terraces,  
Or else all Juno from an urn displays  
Before the indifferent garden deities ;  
Oh, what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways  
Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease  
And Childhood a delight for every sense,  
But take our greatness with our violence !

What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,  
And buildings that a haughtier age designed,  
The pacing to and fro on polished floors  
Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined  
With famous portraits of our ancestors ;  
What if those things the greatest of mankind  
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,  
But take our greatness with our bitterness !

## II

### MY HOUSE

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,  
A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,  
An acre of stony ground,  
Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,  
Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,  
The sound of the rain or sound  
Of every wind that blows ;  
The stilted water-hen  
Crossing stream again  
Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows ;



A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,  
A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,  
A candle and written page.

*Il Penseroso's* Platonist toiled on  
In some like chamber, shadowing forth  
How the daemonic rage  
Imagined everything.

Benighted travellers  
From markets and from fairs  
Have seen his midnight candle glimmering.

Two men have founded here. A man-at-arms  
Gathered a score of horse and spent his days  
In this tumultuous spot,  
Where through long wars and sudden night alarms  
His dwindling score and he seemed castaways  
Forgetting and forgot ;  
And I, that after me  
My bodily heirs may find,  
To exalt a lonely mind,  
Befitting emblems of adversity.

### III

#### MY TABLE

Two heavy trestles, and a board  
Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword,  
By pen and paper lies,  
That it may moralise  
My days out of their aimlessness.  
A bit of an embroidered dress  
Covers its wooden sheath.  
Chaucer had not drawn breath

When it was forged. In Sato's house,  
Curved like new moon, moon-luminous,  
It lay five hundred years.  
Yet if no change appears  
No moon ; only an aching heart  
Conceives a changeless work of art.  
Our learned men have urged  
That when and where 'twas forged  
A marvellous accomplishment,  
In painting or in pottery, went  
From father unto son  
And through the centuries ran  
And seemed unchanging like the sword.  
Soul's beauty being most adored,  
Men and their business took  
The soul's unchanging look ;  
For the most rich inheritor,  
Knowing that none could pass Heaven's door  
That loved inferior art,  
Had such an aching heart  
That he, although a country's talk  
For silken clothes and stately walk,  
Had waking wits ; it seemed  
Juno's peacock screamed.

#### IV

#### MY DESCENDANTS

Having inherited a vigorous mind  
From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams  
And leave a woman and a man behind  
As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems

Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,  
Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,  
But the torn petals strew the garden plot ;  
And there's but common greenness after that.

And what if my descendants lose the flower  
Through natural declension of the soul,  
Through too much business with the passing hour,  
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool ?  
May this laborious stair and this stark tower  
Become a roofless ruin that the owl  
May build in the cracked masonry and cry  
Her desolation to the desolate sky.

The Primum Mobile that fashioned us  
Has made the very owls in circles move ;  
And I, that count myself most prosperous,  
Seeing that love and friendship are enough,  
For an old neighbour's friendship chose the house  
And decked and altered it for a girl's love,  
And know whatever flourish and decline  
These stones remain their monument and mine.

V

THE ROAD AT MY DOOR

An affable Irregular,  
A heavily built Falstaffian man,  
Comes cracking jokes of civil war  
As though to die by gunshot were  
The finest play under the sun.

A brown Lieutenant and his men,  
Half dressed in national uniform,  
Stand at my door, and I complain  
Of the foul weather, hail and rain,  
A pear tree broken by the storm.

I count those feathered balls of soot  
The moor-hen guides upon the stream,  
To silence the envy in my thought ;  
And turn towards my chamber, caught  
In the cold snows of a dream.

#### IV

##### THE STARE'S NEST BY MY WINDOW

The bees build in the crevices  
Of loosening masonry, and there  
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.  
My wall is loosening ; honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
On our uncertainty ; somewhere  
A man is killed, or a house burned,  
Yet no clear fact to be discerned :  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood ;  
Some fourteen days of civil war ;  
Last night they trundled down the road  
That dead young soldier in his blood :  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart's grown brutal from the fare,  
More substance in our enmities  
Than in our love ; oh, honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

## VII

I SEE PHANTOMS OF HATRED AND OF THE HEART'S  
FULLNESS AND OF THE COMING EMPTINESS

I climb to the tower top and lean upon broken stone,  
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,  
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon  
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,  
A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind  
And those white glimmering fragments of the mist  
sweep by.  
Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind ;  
Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

" Vengeance upon the murderers," the cry goes up,  
" Vengeance for Jacques Molay." In cloud-pale  
rags, or in lace,  
The rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry  
troop,  
Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at arm or at  
face,  
Plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers spread-  
ing wide  
For the embrace of nothing ; and I, my wits astray  
Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried  
For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.

Their legs long, delicate and slender, aquamarine their  
eyes,

Magical unicorns bear ladies on their backs,  
The ladies close their musing eyes. No prophecies,  
Remembered out of Babylonian almanacs,  
Have closed the ladies' eyes, their minds are but a  
pool

Where even longing drowns under its own excess ;  
Nothing but stillness can remain when hearts are full  
Of their own sweetness, bodies of their loveliness.

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,  
The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of cloud  
or of lace,

Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made  
lean,

Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place  
To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie,  
Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone,  
Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,  
The innumerable clanging wings that have put out  
the moon.

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair  
Wonder how many times I could have proved my  
worth

In something that all others understand or share ;  
But oh, ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth  
A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,  
It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,  
The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,  
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.

## THE WHEEL

THROUGH winter-time we call on spring,  
And through the spring on summer call,  
And when abounding hedges ring  
Declare that winter's best of all ;  
And after that there's nothing good  
Because the spring-time has not come—  
Nor know that what disturbs our blood  
Is but its longing for the tomb.

## A PRAYER FOR MY SON

BID a strong ghost stand at the head  
That my Michael may sleep sound,  
Nor cry, nor turn in the bed  
Till his morning meal come round ;  
And may departing twilight keep  
All dread afar till morning's back,  
That his mother may not lack  
Her fill of sleep.

Bid the ghost have sword in fist :  
Some there are, for I avow  
Such devilish things exist,  
Who have planned his murder for they know  
Of some most haughty deed or thought  
That waits upon his future days,  
And would through hatred of the bays  
Bring that to nought.

Though You can fashion everything  
From nothing every day, and teach  
The morning stars to sing,  
You have lacked articulate speech  
To tell Your simplest want, and known,  
Wailing upon a woman's knee,  
All of that worst ignominy  
Of flesh and bone ;

And when through all the town there ran  
The servants of Your enemy,  
A woman and a man,  
Unless the Holy Writings lie,



Hurried through the smooth and rough  
And through the fertile and waste,  
Protecting, till the danger past,  
With human love.

## TWO SONGS FROM A PLAY

### I

I SAW a staring virgin stand  
Where holy Dionysus died,  
And tear the heart out of his side,  
And lay the heart upon her hand  
And bear that beating heart away ;  
And then did all the Muses sing  
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,  
As though God's death were but a play.

Another Troy must rise and set,  
Another lineage feed the crow,  
Another Argo's painted prow  
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.  
The Roman Empire stood appalled :  
It dropped the reins of peace and war  
When that fierce virgin and her Star  
Out of the fabulous darkness called.

### II

In pity for man's darkening thought  
He walked that room and issued thence  
In Galilean turbulence ;  
The Babylonian starlight brought  
A fabulous, formless darkness in ;  
Odour of blood when Christ was slain  
Made all Platonic tolerance vain  
And vain all Doric discipline.

FROM "OEDIPUS AT COLONUS"

I

ENDURE what life God gives and ask no longer span ;  
Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-  
wearied aged man ;  
Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be  
vain.

II

Even from that delight memory treasures so,  
Death, despair, division of families, all entangle-  
ments of mankind grow,  
As that old wandering beggar and these God-hated  
children know.

III

In the long echoing street the laughing dancers  
throng,  
The bride is carried to the bridegroom's chamber  
through torchlight and tumultuous song ;  
I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long.

IV

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say ;  
Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have  
looked into the eye of day ;  
The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn  
away.

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